No. 148 JULY 10 - 1915 5 CENTS

Nick Carter Stories

THE MARK OF CAIN

or Nick Carter's Air Line Case

NICK CARTER STORIES

Issued Weekly. Entered as Second-class Matter at the New York Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 *Seventh Ave., New York.*

Copyright, 1915, by STREET & SMITH. *O. G. Smith and G. C. Smith, Proprietors.*

Terms to NICK CARTER STORIES Mail Subscribers.
(Postage Free.)
Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months..... 65c. One year $2.50
4 months..... 85c. 2 copies one year 4.00
6 months..... $1.25 1 copy two years..... 4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

No. 148. NEW YORK, July 10, 1915. **Price Five Cents.**

THE MARK OF CAIN;

Or, NICK CARTER'S AIR-LINE CASE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE GIRL DID.

The girl at the switchboard held her breath. The detective waiting in the business office saw her. The girl at the switchboard was Helen Bailey. The waiting detective was Nick Carter.

No man was ever more quick than he to rightly interpret a facial expression. The partition through which he saw her was of glass, or a portion of it, dividing the general manager's office in the central telephone exchange from the room in which the great switchboards were stationed.

There were other girls, half a score of them, seated in front of the innumerably perforated boards. They were too busy to notice one another. Their eyes were intent upon their work. Their deft hands flew from plug to plug, withdrawing some, inserting others. Their frequent, monotonous calls, the noise of the buzzers and the snapping of the rubber-covered plugs were the only sounds to be heard in that busy room.

"Hello! hello!"

"Number, please."

"The line is busy."

They were like machines, those switchboard girls, human, living, palpitating machines, each a connecting link for others in every phase of life, every calling and vocation, from the gilded mansions of exclusive society to the smoke-begrimed dives of the underworld. They are the servants of all, and, in a measure, the confidantes of all.

The girl who had caught Nick Carter's eye was striking not alone because of her facial expression at that moment, but because of her remarkable grace and beauty. She was about nineteen, a pronounced blonde, with regular features, large, blue eyes, and a sensitive mouth, a pink-and-white complexion, an abundance of wavy, golden hair, crowning a shapely head, finely poised on a graceful, slender, yet well-developed figure, then clad in a navy-blue skirt and a dainty white waist.

It was the expression on her fair face, however, that had riveted the detective's attention, though he could see her only in part profile.

Nick never had seen a look of more poignant anguish on a human face.

The girl was pitched forward on her high chair, her hand grasping one of the plugs which she had pushed into the switchboard—and now seemed impelled to withdraw.

That would have abruptly ended the conversation between the two persons whom she had brought into communication, and to whose intercourse she was listening.

That she really was listening, listening as one might to the reading of one's own death warrant, was painfully apparent. Her eyes seemed to be starting from her head, but with the wildly vacant expression of one horrified, one whose mind was elsewhere. Every vestige of color had left her cheeks. Her lips were gray and drawn, her graceful figure as motionless as if every nerve and muscle was as strained and tense as a bowstring.

"Great Scott!" thought Nick, watching her. "To whom is she listening, and to what?"

The girl suddenly withdrew the plug.

Then, with a quick change of expression, with a look of heart-racking determination, she inserted it again, renewing the telephone connection.

Then she listened again, ghastly and horrified, for nearly a minute—and then her head dropped to one shoulder as if her neck was hinged, her arm fell like that of a corpse, dragging the plug out of the switchboard, while her tense form relaxed and fell from the chair, dropping with a thud upon the floor beside it.

Nick Carter had seen what was coming, and he already was on his way to the room, darting out of the manager's office and through the adjoining corridor. He heard the screams of the frightened girls, when he en-

tered, and, with quick discrimination, he turned to the least-alarmed one and said:

"She has only fainted. Bring a glass of water. Be quick about it."

"Yes, sir."

The girl addressed ran to a near closet and obeyed him.

Nick raised the prostrate girl a little, supporting her against his knee, and, with a wet handkerchief, he bathed her brow and cheeks, paying no attention to the fright and consternation of his observers.

The girl revived in a very few moments. A low moan, as pathetic as the facial expression which had preceded her collapse, broke from her gray lips. Her eyelids fluttered spasmodically, then were raised, and she gazed up vacantly at the detective's kindly face.

"Did they—did they get him?" she gasped impulsively, almost frantically. "Did they—did they get him?"

Nick waved aside the several girls who had gathered near.

"Open one of the windows!" he commanded. "Give her some fresh air. Get whom, my girl?"

The last was addressed to the stricken girl, while Nick gently raised her to a sitting position on the floor.

She turned and looked at him, then suddenly seemed to realize what had occurred. She gazed at Nick again, striving to rise, and replied, more calmly:

"Get whom? What do you mean?"

"Don't you know what I mean?" Nick inquired, helping her to a chair.

"No, I don't," she replied. "Thank you for assisting me. I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

Nick was sure of the contrary, but he did not say so. Instead, he smiled and explained his presence there by saying:

"I happened to be in the manager's office when you fainted. I saw you fall and hurried in to aid you. Are you subject to such attacks?"

"No, sir. I don't remember ever having fainted away before."

"You may have heard something that alarmed you, or——"

"No, no, sir; nothing of the kind," interrupted the girl. "I cannot account for it."

"Do you remember what number had been called, what connection you had made?"

"No, sir."

"Or what was being said?"

"I do not," the girl insisted. "I remember nothing about it. I know only that I was not feeling well this morning. I awoke with a racking headache. I suddenly felt dizzy and then I fainted. That is all I know about it. Please don't question me further. I'm able, now, to return to my work. Thank you again, sir."

Nick knew that the girl was lying, but he alone had observed her agitation for several moments before she fainted. She still was pale and nervous, trembling visibly while she replied to his questions, but it was obvious that she was determined to admit nothing in regard to what she evidently had heard at the switchboard.

Nick decided not to press her further, therefore, and he bowed indifferently and returned to the business office.

Manager Lawton, for whom he had been waiting, came in a few moments later and Nick transacted the business for which he had called. He then quietly told him of the incident and pointed out the girl who had fainted.

"What is her name?" he then inquired.

"Helen Bailey," replied Lawton, smiling. "She is the most capable girl in our employ."

"She is a very beautiful girl, too," Nick observed.

"And as good as she is beautiful," Lawton said, with a nod. "The man who gets her for a wife, Nick, will get a treasure."

"Where does she live?"

"She boards in Lexington Avenue."

"With her parents?"

"No. Both are dead. She has only a brother, I believe, who—well, I know very little about him. Why are you so interested in the girl?" Lawton added, laughing. "You're not smitten with her beauty, Nick, are you?"

Nick smiled and shook his head; then arose to go. As he passed out he glanced again through the glass partition at the several girls at the switchboards.

Helen Bailey had resumed her work as if nothing had occurred.

Nick still had her in mind when he left the building and walked up the street. He had in mind, too, the impulsive, almost frantic words that had broken from her when, with returning consciousness, she took up her train of thoughts just where she had left them—the thoughts which had brought that terrible expression to her fair, lovely face.

"'Did they get him?'" he said to himself. "By Jove, that was a rather significant question, asked as she asked it and under such circumstances. Get whom? Get him for what? Was some man in danger, one with whom she is in love, perhaps, and for whose sake she was so shocked and alarmed? There certainly was some serious reason for that horrified expression and her sudden collapse. I would have been glad to aid her if she would have confided in me, but she preferred to lie, and—well, it was up to her. It is barely possible that she will regret it later."

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Nick Carter's intuition in regard to the telephone girl was verified much sooner than he really expected. He entered his Madison Avenue residence about an hour later and found in the library his two chief assistants, Chickering Carter and Patsy Garvan. He heard the following remarks from Patsy as he was approaching the open door.

"She certainly is a peach, Chick, and I felt dead sorry for her. She's in wrong, all right, but I don't half credit the charges, at that."

"What charges, Patsy?" Nick inquired, entering. "Of whom were you speaking?"

"Of a girl I saw at police headquarters about twenty minutes ago," said Patsy, turning from his desk. "I went down there on that Waldron case."

"Was the girl under arrest?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"For helping a crook elude the police," Patsy explained. "She denied it, chief, sobbing as if her heart would break; but they're putting her through the third degree now, hoping to break her down and force a confession from her. My money goes on the girl, chief, all the same."

"Who is the girl?" Nick questioned. "Did you learn any of the circumstances?"

"Sure!" nodded Patsy. "Her name is Helen Bailey."

"H'm, is that so?"

"She's a telephone girl, and a sister of Barton Bailey, wanted for robbery in Mantell & Goulard's big department store, where he was employed at the time. He got away with a diamond sunburst, you remember, and nearly cracked the skull of Gus Flint, one of the store detectives, who had seen him lift the bauble and tried to prevent his escape. That was six months ago."

"Yes, I recall the case," said Nick, with a more serious expression. "But what are the circumstances bearing on the girl's arrest?"

"It seems that Bart Bailey was seen going into a house in East Forty-third Street about ten o'clock this morning," Patsy continued. "He was in disguise, but was recognized by some one who declined to give his name to the headquarters chief, to whom he hastened to telephone."

"He stated, I suppose, that he had seen Bailey going into the house."

"That's what," said Patsy. "The chief then called up the precinct station and told the sergeant to go to the house with a couple of men and get Bailey."

"I see."

"Before he could finish giving his instructions, including the number of the house, the telephone connection was suddenly broken. Nearly ten minutes passed before the chief could get it renewed, and that brief delay cost the guns their man. When they arrived at the house, Bailey had been gone about three minutes."

"Did the chief know his sister is employed in the telephone exchange?"

"Bet you!" exclaimed Patsy sententiously. "Let him alone to have learned that. He has had men out after Bailey for nearly six months. He learned, too, that Helen Bailey was the operator who connected him with the precinct station, and he noticed while talking with the sergeant that the connection was broken once and quickly renewed."

"Precisely," thought Nick, recalling his own observations. "He was not alone."

"Half a minute later," Patsy added, "it was broken completely, and the chief lost his man. It made him sore, for fair. He knows the girl must have overheard his orders to the sergeant, and he suspects that she purposely cut him off and afterward telephoned her brother to bolt."

"Not an unreasonable inference," Nick allowed, a bit grimly. "Nevertheless, Patsy, the girl did nothing of the kind."

"Gee whiz!" Patsy returned, gazing. "Are you wise to something bearing on the case? Do you mean——"

"Never mind what I mean," Nick interposed, glancing at his watch. "I'll inform you later. I'll knock those suspicions out of the chief's head in about two shakes of a lamb's tail. Helen Bailey is a heroine—much more heroic than most girls would have been under the same temptation."

Nick did not wait to explain to Chick and Patsy. Disregarding their looks of surprise, he replaced his hat and started immediately for the police headquarters. He was so well known there, where his services were very frequently required, that no one would have thought of opposing him. He learned that the chief still was talking with Helen Bailey in his private office, into which Nick walked without the ceremony of knocking.

The chief regarded him with a look of surprise. It became more marked, even, when Helen Bailey, pale and with eyes red from weeping, uttered a low cry and exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, here is the man who assisted me. This is the man I have told you about. He knows that my faint was not feigned. He will tell you——"

"I will tell the chief all that is necessary, Miss Bailey," Nick interposed, smiling and shaking hands with her. "I am very glad to be able to befriend you."

"Goodness!" said the chief, with his austerity suddenly vanished. "What do you know about this matter, Nick?"

"I know all about it, chief," Nick replied, taking a chair. "Garvan was here when this young lady was brought in. He has told me why she was arrested and what you suspect. But you're in wrong, chief, and I've come here to say a word for the girl."

"A word from you, Carter, is usually enough," replied the chief, while Helen Bailey, hearing the name of the famous detective, gazed at him with amazement and inexpressible relief.

"I can explain in a nutshell," said Nick. "I was in the telephone office, chief, and saw all that occurred."

"What did you make of it, Carter?" asked the chief.

Nick then told him all he had seen and what he had done.

"This girl did not cut you off, chief, but quite the contrary," he added. "She knew, nevertheless, precisely what your communication signified. I saw her withdraw the plug once, then willfully reinsert it. I saw how terribly she felt, how terribly she was tempted—and I now know, too, with what heroism she resisted the temptation and stuck to her duty, though it involved the sacrifice of her own brother."

The chief gazed for a moment at the detective, who had spoken quite feelingly.

"The girl has told me that, Nick, but I could not credit it," he said, more gravely.

"It is true, chief. You can bank on it."

"I'm mighty glad you have showed up, then."

"I knew you would be."

The chief turned to Helen Bailey and laid his hand on hers.

"Pardon me, my girl," he said gently. "We have hard duties to perform at times, and duty leaves us no alternative. You are a good girl and a brave girl, and I'm sorry to have given you so much pain and trouble. I now believe all you have told me, and I'm very proud of you."

Helen was sobbing again, but with mingled gratitude and relief. She turned and grasped Nick's hand, saying brokenly:

"Oh, Mr. Carter, how can I thank you—how can I thank you?"

"By not trying to do so," Nick replied kindly. "These little services are the bright spots in our lives. Go and wait for me in the outer office. I wish to talk with the chief a few moments and I then will join you."

Helen dried her tear-filled eyes and obeyed him.

Nick had remained only to question the chief concerning Bart Bailey, and to find out what had been learned about him in the house he had been seen to enter.

"Nothing was known about him there, Nick," the chief

replied. "It is a lodging house and is run by an honest, elderly woman. Bailey was there about ten days ago, remaining only two nights, and requesting the privilege of leaving a suit case until he could call for it."

"That is why he went there this morning?"

"Yes. He remained only ten minutes."

"He is a stranger to the landlady, I infer."

"Yes, a total stranger. She knows nothing about him. I happen to know, however, that he's a very bad egg, and I wanted to get him."

Nick remained only a few moments longer, then went to the outer office and rejoined the waiting girl.

"Come with me," he said pleasantly. "There is no occasion for you to remain here. I don't think you will ever be wanted again, Miss Bailey."

"I cannot express my gratitude, Mr. Carter," she replied, while she accompanied him to the street.

"Don't try," smiled Nick. "Tell me something about yourself and your brother. He used to work for Mantell & Goulard, I understand."

"Yes, sir. Young Mr. Mantell gave him a position there for—for my sake," said Helen, blushing in a way that Nick rightly interpreted. "But Bart can't go straight. He is bad, awfully bad. He is only my half brother, sir."

Nick saw that the topic was a painful one for her, and he decided not to press his inquiries. He learned that the rascal had frequently threatened her, however, because of her refusals to join in his knavish projects, and that the girl stood somewhat in fear of him.

Nick took her Lexington Avenue address, therefore, and promised to aid her again if occasion required it. Smiling in response to her repeated thanks, he then placed her in a taxicab which he hailed and saw her driven rapidly away, well satisfied with the kindly deed he had done, but not supposing for a moment that it would have any further significance.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN OF LAST RESORT.

"There are detectives, Mr. Carter, and detectives," said Nick Carter's visitor. "By that I mean that only half of them are worthy of the name. Half of the remainder are mediocre, and only one in a hundred of the rest is really keen and clever. You, Mr. Carter, are the recognized man of last resort. When all others have failed, it is to you that the harrowed victim of crookdom turns for aid, as the only man in Christendom who can ferret out the truth and round up the guilty. That, sir, is why I am here."

Nick Carter laughed.

"You are complimentary, Mr. Mantell, and I appreciate your very exalted opinion of me," he replied, a bit dryly. "All that sounds very nice and pretty, remarkably so, but it does not do what you asserted. It tells me only what impelled you to come here, not why you are here. Suppose you come to the point and tell me why."

Nick's visitor joined in the detective's genial laugh, as did Chick and Patsy, who were seated with them in Nick's attractively furnished library. It was about seven o'clock in the evening, that of the very day on which had occurred the episodes described.

He was a young man, this visitor, of remarkably frank and prepossessing appearance. He was still under thirty, set up like an athlete and scrupulously well dressed. He was the type of man to whom others are instinctively drawn, and to whom women turn for a second look.

Nick long had known him by name and sight, the only son of wealthy Henry Mantell, of Mantell & Goulard, the owners of the vast Sixth Avenue department store to which reference already has been made, and which then was by far the largest establishment of its kind in the country. He was Frank Mantell, of whom Helen Bailey had spoken to Nick in connection with the robbery committed by her recreant brother.

"Come to the point, eh?" he replied, still smiling. "That is a very good suggestion, Mr. Carter, and I will act upon it. Mr. Goulard, the junior partner of our firm, was to have met here to discuss our business with you. Pending his arrival, however, I will do what you suggest and tell you why I am here."

"Very good. I am all ears," Nick remarked, knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"I am here, Mr. Carter, because of the tremendous leak in our business," said Frank, more gravely. "I refer, of course, to the department store of Mantell & Goulard, of which I am one of the managers. My father, you know, is the senior partner."

"I am acquainted with your father," Nick bowed. "When was this leak discovered?"

"Six months ago, after our semiannual taking of stock. Our business showed a shrinkage of more than thirty thousand dollars. That of the past six months is even worse, running close to fifty thousand. In other words, Mr. Carter, the leakage the past year is close upon eighty thousand dollars."

"Much too large to be charged to the profit-and-loss account," said Nick. "Are you unable to discover the cause?"

"Quite the contrary, Mr. Carter," said Mantell. "We know the cause."

"Namely?"

"Robbery."

"Money?"

"No. Merchandise."

"You don't mean that eighty thousand dollars' worth of merchandise has been taken from your store in the past year, and that you are unable to discover the thieves," said Nick.

"That is precisely what I mean," Frank replied, a bit more forcibly. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Carter, we are up against a most extraordinary game of systematic and persistent robbery. Day after day, and frequently during the night, articles of material value disappear most mysteriously from all parts of the store. We don't know where they go, nor how the thefts are committed. We have not the slightest clew to the identity of the robbers."

"What kinds of goods are chiefly missing?"

"All kinds, but invariably articles of considerable value. Costly laces of every description, fine handkerchiefs, pocketbooks, and jewelry, full pieces of expensive silks and satins, fine lace draperies, and—but I could not begin to enumerate them. They disappear as if they had evaporated from our shelves, counters, and show cases."

"Can it be the work of professional shoplifters?"

"Impossible; utterly impossible! It is much too extensive."

"How about your help?"

"Equally out of the question," said Mantell decidedly.

"We employ about nine hundred clerks, but they have absolutely no opportunity for thefts of such character and magnitude. It would be impossible for them to take the goods from the store without being detected. We have had them closely watched, nevertheless, since these daily robberies were first discovered, but we have failed to detect a single thief among our employees.

"You have store detectives, of course?" said Nick inquiringly.

"Yes, on every floor."

"Have they accomplished anything?"

"So little, Mr. Carter, that we put the case into the hands of half a dozen headquarters men about two months ago. Their work has been equally futile. Not a piece of the stolen goods has been traced. Not a clew has been found pointing to the identity of the crooks, or the way in which the thefts were committed."

"That seems very strange," Nick remarked.

"Strange is right, chief, and then some," put in Patsy. "There must be a bunch of clever ginks at work along new and original lines."

"That seems to be about the size of it," Nick added.

"And that is precisely how the matter stands," Frank Mantell continued. "As I said in the beginning, Mr. Carter, you are the man of last resort. All others have failed, and we now turn to you for advice and assistance. I think we should have done so at the outset. It would have saved us a barrel of money."

"You seem to feel sure that I shall succeed in solving the mystery," smiled Nick.

"Frankly, Mr. Carter, I do," Mantell rejoined. "Success seems to be one of your invariable acquirements. I feel that it will prove so in this case."

"Providing I decide to take the case."

"I hope you will not demur over that."

"Let me ask you a few questions," said Nick, drawing up in his chair and dropping his burned cigar into a cuspidor. "Are any headquarters men now at work on the case?"

"No, sir. We dropped the last of them to-day."

"Your store detectives still are at work?"

"Only in line with their customary duties. They would not in any way interfere with your work."

"I would not permit them to do so," Nick said, a bit dryly. "It would be even better, perhaps, if they were ignorant of my interest in the matter. Who besides you knows of your intention to employ me on the case?"

"Only my father, Mr. Goulard, and Mr. Lombard. My father and I look after the correspondence and the financial end of the business. Mr. Goulard and Mr. Lombard have entire charge of operations in the store. Goulard is, of course, the chief director. We decided this afternoon to appeal to you for aid. No one else is informed of our intention."

"Make it a point, then, to inform no one else," Nick replied. "I will at least look into the matter and see what I can make of it."

"Ah, I am glad to hear that."

"Now, Mr. Mantell, when did you first suspect this system of wholesale robbery and begin to investigate it?" Nick inquired.

"About six months ago," Frank replied. "We knew of many thefts previous to that time, and tried in vain to discover the culprits. Not until we had taken stock and our books showed such a tremendous leakage, however, did we realize how extensive a felony we were up against. We then began the investigations that have proved so futile."

"That was about the time Bart Bailey was seen stealing a diamond sunburst, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," said Mantell, with a look of surprise. "How did you learn about that?"

"The newspapers mentioned it," Nick said evasively.

"Ah, yes; I remember."

"Did you at that time, or since, suspect that Bailey was in league with the gang of crooks committing the numerous robberies? I speak of them as a gang, of course, because such extensive work would require several persons and careful coöperation."

"We suspected it, certainly, but there was no other evidence in confirmation of it," Mantell explained. "After the escape and disappearance of Bailey, moreover, the robberies continued as frequently as before. That indicated in a measure that he was not identified with the other thieves."

"Possibly," Nick allowed. "I happen to know that Bart Bailey, as he is called, is a somewhat vicious character. Were you aware of that when he was employed in your store?"

Mantell colored slightly, but showed no inclination to hide the truth.

"I was aware of it," he admitted. "I had a personal reason for giving him employment. Frankly, Mr. Carter, I am deeply in love with his sister Helen Bailey, who is as good and virtuous as he is vicious."

"You employed him for her sake?"

"Yes. I wanted to give him a chance. I told him just what I knew about him, and gave him a talking to, man-to-man fashion, and he promised to go dead straight and do his best. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, for I would have pushed him forward for all he was worth," Mantell earnestly added. "But I fear it isn't in him, Carter, to be anything but a crook."

"It appears so, Mr. Mantell, surely."

"I would marry Helen to-morrow, with the sanction of all of my family, if she would have me," Frank gravely asserted. "But she cannot ignore the fact that her brother is an outlaw of society, and she feels that she must not bring disgrace upon me. Dear, foolish girl! as if she were responsible for the conduct of her brother. Hang it! he's only her half brother at that, and—ah, that should be Mr. Goulard. We will plan for your campaign against these infernal thieves."

"There will be no planning with me, Mantell," Nick replied, as Joseph, his butler, passed through the hall and answered the doorbell. "I do my own planning and work out problems in my own peculiar way. I will be pleased to meet Mr. Goulard, nevertheless, and hear what he has to say."

Frank Mantell was right in that the caller was Gaston Goulard, and he was presently ushered in by the butler. He was an erect, somewhat imposing man close upon fifty. He was smooth shaved, of dark complexion, with strong features and penetrating black eyes. He had been a widower about four years, having no children, but still retaining his fine Fifth Avenue residence and a retinue of servants. He was a member of the best clubs, and a man of recognized ability, political influence, and social standing.

Mr. Mantell received him graciously and introduced him

to Chick and Patsy, while Goulard removed his kid gloves and shook hands with all.

"You are here before me, Frank," he remarked, after greeting the detectives. "I was unavoidably detained."

"I don't think it matters," Mantell replied. "I have told Mr. Carter all that you could have told him and all that he is really inclined to hear. He has consented to take the case and——"

"Very good," Goulard interrupted, in somewhat brusque and metallic tones. "I am glad to hear it. What do you intend doing, Mr. Carter? That is the main question."

Nick gazed at him quite intently.

"I really don't know," he replied.

"Don't know?"

"Not yet."

"You mean——"

"Only what I say—that I don't know," Nick put in, smiling. "I must consider the matter. I must determine what best can be done. I must visit your store and size up the opportunities for such wholesale robbery, before I can say what I will do. You can hardly expect more of me at present, Mr. Goulard."

"Very true, perhaps," Goulard admitted, with signs of reluctance. "We are up against such a costly game, however, and have found the efforts of other detectives so entirely useless, that I really wondered what steps you would take to discover the thieves."

"I wonder, too, since hearing Mr. Mantell's statements," Nick replied, smiling again. "It appears like a difficult problem, Mr. Goulard."

"It does, indeed, and you must keep me informed of your progress."

"I will make it a point to do that."

"That is all we can reasonably ask, then," said Goulard, with an approving nod. "If we can aid you in any way, or——"

"I will inform you, Mr. Goulard, in that case."

"Very good. When will you begin your work?"

"Just as soon as I have decided how to begin it," said Nick. "Like Davy Crockett, I make sure I am right before going ahead. I think you may expect me, or one of my assistants, at your store to-morrow morning."

"I would prefer that you give the matter your personal attention," said Goulard suggestively.

"I always do that, sir, when engaged in an investigation of even the simplest kind of a case," Nick said, with seeming indifference.

"Gee! if that gazabo gets anything out of the chief, he'll do it with a double, back-action corkscrew," thought Patsy, noting Nick's suave reticence and not half liking the strong, dark face of this second visitor.

Mr. Goulard did not prolong his interview, however, save to discuss the matter in a general way and learn what information Mantell had imparted. It was eight o'clock when the two men left the detective's residence, Nick seeing them to the door and then returning to the library.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Chick at once inquired. "I saw that you were not inclined to confide your opinions to Goulard. That convinced me that you had formed one, at least."

"Gee! I was hit in the same spot," declared Patsy.

Nick smiled and resumed his seat.

"I wouldn't confide in either of them," he replied. "I have, as you infer, come to at least one conclusion."

"What is that?"

"These robberies are not the work of shoplifters nor any outside crooks," said Nick. "They have been much too numerous and varied. The crooks are among the persons employed in the store."

"I think so, too," Chick nodded.

"And for that reason alone, Chick, I would confide in no one in the store, from the heads of the firm down to the boy who sweeps the back stairs," said Nick. "That is a mistake many detectives make, that of blindly confiding, perhaps, in the very culprit they are out to get."

"Gee! that's right, chief," put in Patsy.

"If any inquisitive person in that store learns of my designs, it will be only when they culminate, and his curiosity may cost him something," Nick pointedly added. "Secrecy is imperative to successful work in a case of this kind."

"I agree with you," said Chick, with a nod of approval.

"It sure does look like inside work," said Patsy. "But how do they get out with the goods? The headquarters men are not lunkheads, nor are the store detectives blind. How do the crooks get out with such quantities of merchandise?"

"We must find the answer to that question," Nick replied. "Other detectives, in their efforts to discover the crooks themselves, may have neglected to look sharply enough for it. We may meet with more success, in fact, by working backward."

"Working backward, chief?" questioned Patsy. "What do you mean?"

"By finding out where the goods are disposed of, through what channel they reach their destination, and by working back over the same route, even to the moment of the theft," Nick explained.

"By Jove, that plan might prove profitable," said Chick. "The goods cannot have been pawned in this city. The headquarters men would have run them down within forty-eight hours."

"Undoubtedly," Nick agreed. "It is safe to assume, nevertheless, that the goods are stolen to be converted into money, which necessitates either pawning or selling them. They may have been shipped to some other city for that purpose."

"Quite likely."

"But how are we to learn what city, chief, assuming that you are right?" questioned Patsy.

"I have a hunch that the way will appear," replied Nick. "There is one other point of which we can take advantage, I think, and it may start us on the case right off the reel."

"You mean?"

"Bart Bailey's presence in New York, and what occurred to-day."

"What do you see in that?"

"I am convinced that Bailey was in league with the other crooks when he stole the diamond sunburst, and it's a hundred to one that he still is in league with them in some capacity," Nick explained. "If he had not been stealing the jewel, it probably would have gone the way of the other plunder. The circumstances forced him to bolt with it, however, and to lie low ever since."

"But how can we take advantage of all that?" asked Chick. "I don't quite get you."

"We'll take advantage of his antipathy for his half

sister," said Nick. "He don't like her, despite their kinship, and he already has repeatedly threatened her."

"But how take advantage of it?"

"He will hear of what occurred to-day; that she made no intentional move to prevent the police from getting him, despite that she could easily have done so," said Nick. "Take it from me, Chick, he'll get after her for that. He will hate her more than before, the knavish rat, and may go even so far as to attempt violence. By keeping an eye on her, therefore, we not only may protect her, but also pick up Bart Bailey himself. Then, if he still is in league with the department-store thieves, we perhaps may trail him to the lair of the entire gang."

"By Jove, that's no wild-and-weird fancy," Chick now declared, with some enthusiasm. "That really looks good to me, Nick."

"That being the case, Chick, you had better tackle that string to our bow," Nick directed. "Pack a grip with what you may need for a few days, and go in disguise to the Lexington Avenue house in which Helen Bailey is boarding."

"To remain there?"

"Yes, temporarily. Engage a room and board, if possible, and you then will have the girl right under your eye. Reveal nothing to her, however. That might queer an opportunity to pick up her brother."

"Trust me to have foreseen that," Chick replied, rising. "I'll be ready to leave in ten minutes, and will phone you to-morrow morning."

"Good enough," Nick said approvingly. "A reference may be required by the landlady. Take the name of Fred Lamont, and say you are a nephew of Mr. Calvin Page, cashier of the Trinity Trust Company. I will presently telephone to Page and inform him of the situation. He will assure the landlady, in case she rings him up."

"I've got you," Chick nodded, turning to go.

"I will have decided by to-morrow how Patsy and I can best begin operations," Nick added. "I think we'll take a look at the store, for a starter, and at a few of its nine hundred clerks."

"We may pick the crooks from the nine hundred merely by their looks," laughed Patsy. "That would be going some, chief, for fair."

CHAPTER IV.

PICKING UP A TRAIL.

Chick Carter appeared at the door of the Lexington Avenue lodging house about nine o'clock that evening, and his ring was answered by the landlady herself, one Mrs. Hardy, to whom he stated his mission and plausibly explained why he applied to her at that hour.

That Chick made a favorable impression upon the woman, moreover, appeared in that he was invited to enter, though Mrs. Hardy added, a bit doubtfully:

"I have only one vacant room at present, sir, and that may not please you. It is a back room on the second floor."

"I think it will answer," Chick said agreeably. "I cannot say just how long I may remain in New York, but I will pay you liberally for the time I am here. My name is Fred Lamont. I am a nephew of Mr. Calvin Page, cashier of the Trinity Trust Company. You can talk with him by telephone, if you require a reference, and he will assure you that I am a desirable tenant."

"I will do so a little later, Mr. Lamont, if I think it necessary," said the landlady. "I first will show you the room."

Chick accompanied her to the second floor and into a small but neatly furnished back chamber.

"That in front is occupied by a young lady, Miss Helen Bailey, who is not at home this evening," Mrs. Hardy observed, while Chick was glancing around the room. "She has gone to a picture show with a girl who lives a block south from here."

Chick did not demur over taking the room. It was decidedly satisfactory to him, in fact, to have quarters so near the girl's room, in that he would be easily able to keep a constant eye on her movements when at home, and to learn whether she was visited by her disreputable brother.

Chick took the room at once, therefore, paying a week in advance, and inquired, while doing so:

"Does Miss Bailey frequently have visitors in the evening? I usually retire quite early. Her room is so near mine that any loud conversation might disturb me."

"Dear me, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, with a shrug. "Miss Bailey has only two gentlemen callers, and she always receives them in the parlor."

"That's all right, then," said Chick, smiling agreeably.

"She could pick her choice from most men, Mr. Lamont, as far as that goes," added the landlady, becoming communicative. "She is a beautiful girl. She could marry the son of one of the wealthiest merchants in New York, if she wanted to, or another one of the firm. I know that, sir, though you may think it improbable."

"One of the firm," thought Chick. "By Jove, that must be Goulard. Father and son would not be rivals. Besides, Mantell, senior, now has a wife and family. Goulard is a widower, however, and—h'm, this may be worth looking into."

Chick decided not to display any undue curiosity at that time. He left his suit case in the room and accompanied Mrs. Hardy downstairs, stating that he had business outside for about an hour, when he would return, and he then left the house.

Three minutes later found him in the vestibuled doorway of a dwelling nearly opposite, from which he could see the electric-lighted avenue for a block in each direction.

Chick reasoned, in view of Nick's suspicions, that Bart Bailey might already have heard of his sister's conduct and might possibly be seeking her that very evening, particularly if impending danger necessitated his early departure from the city.

Chick had decided, in fact, that he would see Helen Bailey home after she parted from the girl who had accompanied her to the picture show. He knew that she would be in no danger while having a companion, and the vantage point he had selected enabled him to watch the avenue as far as the location mentioned by the landlady.

"She'll not return later than eleven o'clock, if she has gone to the movies," he said to himself. "There is one chance in a hundred, at least, that Bart Bailey already is out to nail her. I'll take that one chance, having nothing else to do."

All this was clever work on the part of the Carters, and it bore not unexpected fruit.

Chick had been waiting less than half an hour when

he saw a slender man in a dark suit coming down the avenue, whose movements immediately warranted suspicion. For he quickly crossed the avenue before arriving at the boarding house, then halted on the opposite side and gazed intently at the second-floor windows.

"By Jove, I'm in right," thought Chick, after watching him for seevral moments. "That's my man, as sure as there's juice in a lemon. He expected to find the girl at home, but sees that her room is not lighted. He'll lie low and wait for her, taking a chance that she'll return alone, unless I'm much mistaken."

Chick was not mistaken.

Bart Bailey, for the detective had rightly identified him, suddenly recrossed the avenue, and, having glanced sharply around, he slunk into a basement doorway under the rise of stone steps leading up to the front door of the boarding house.

"Does he intend to enter, or will he wait for the girl?" Chick asked himself. "I'll remain here until she comes, at all events. If he does not then show up, I'll cross over and enter with her. I'll give the rat no chance to harm her, let come what may."

Chick's uncertainty was not of long duration.

The man under the steps, if still there, continued to lie low.

Twenty minutes passed, and the watching detective then saw two girls stop at a house nearly a block away. He could see them quite distinctly, the avenue in that locality then being deserted. They parted after a few moments, one entering the house, the other hurrying north. Half a minute brought her nearly to the boarding-house steps—from under which darted a sinister figure that immediately blocked her way.

Chick heard the half-subdued cry of alarm that broke from her, as well as what followed.

"Bart!" she cried, shrinking. "You here!"

"You bet I'm here!" The reply came with a wolfish snarl. "So you'd have let 'em get me, would you?"

"Get you! What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. You'd have given me to the guns. You know—and I know."

"Bart——"

"Dry up! Would you blat my name from the housetops? I believe you would do that, you infernal jade.

The girl shrank from the miscreant's uplifted hand, from the fierce, threatening look in his fiery eyes.

"Don't speak to me like that," she cried, striving to pass him and reach the steps. "Don't you dare to strike me. I'll scream for help. I'll——"

"You open your mouth to scream, hang you, and I'll close it forever," Bailey fiercely interrupted. "You'd have given me to the guns. You'd have sent me up——"

"Let me pass!"

"And I'll send you to the devil for it. I'll teach you to——"

The miscreant got no farther with his vicious threats.

Chick had seen him reach into his pocket. He had caught the glint of light from a partly drawn blade. He already was nearly across the street, unobserved by either, and he now whipped out his revolver and uttered a shout, though scarce twenty feet from the couple, bent only upon causing Bart Bailey to take to his heels.

"Cut that out!" he shouted. "Let the girl alone, or——"

"Who in thunder are you?"

The ruffian swung round with an oath, interrupting, and Chick bounded nearer, with his revolver suddenly leveled.

"You leg it, you rascal!" he cried, while a scream broke from the frightened girl. "Leg it, or——"

But Bart Bailey already was legging it. He had turned the instant he saw the weapon, and was darting like a frightened fox up the avenue, crossing it diagonally at the top of his speed, and making for the nearest corner.

Chick sped after him, but purposely let the rascal increase his lead, bent upon finally trailing him without being suspected.

Bailey rounded the corner some twenty yards in advance of the detective, and continued his frantic flight.

Chick turned the corner a moment later. He saw the rascal was not looking back. He darted into the nearest doorway, then crouched on the stone steps and cautiously peered out.

Bart Bailey was crossing the street, still at the top of his speed, and heading for Third Avenue. Suddenly he glanced back over his shoulder and discovered that he no longer was pursued. He slowed down, and finally stopped, gazing back and listening, and then he appeared convinced that his pursuer had stopped before turning the corner. As if to give vent to his feelings, he fiercely shook his fist in the direction from which he had come, and then he turned on his heel and walked away.

Chick watched him until he rounded the corner of Third Avenue. He paused only to be sure the fellow did not look back, and then he began a record-breaking sprint in pursuit of the scamp. He arrived at the corner just in time to see Bailey entering an opposite saloon.

"There, by Jove, that does settle it," he said to himself. "I certainly have fooled him. He does not suspect me of being a detective, or he would have continued his flight. He probably reasons that I came out of one of the opposite dwellings and turned back to look after the girl. It should be soft walking, now, to trail the rascal to cover."

Chick had prepared himself for the work he had in view. He made a quick change of disguise, then crossed the avenue and looked into the saloon.

Bart Bailey was gulping down a glass of whisky, after which he left the saloon by a side door, then made for the nearest elevated station.

Chick followed him, mounting the stairway on the opposite corner from that taken by his quarry.

When the train arrived at Thirty-fourth Street, Bailey left the train, trailed by Chick. The young rogue ran down the stairs and jumped aboard a crosstown car. Chick had followed his quarry, and both dismounted at the Pennsylvania Station, where Bailey got a suit case from the parcel room, and then hastened to board an outbound train, entering the smoking car and taking one of the front seats.

Chick followed him and took one in the middle of the car.

"He must have a return ticket to some point, not having bought one," he said to himself. "This may confirm another of Nick's suspicions, that the stolen merchandise is being shipped to another city, and that Bailey still is in league with the gang in some capacity. I'll soon find out where he's going, since it's up to me to go with him."

Chick conferred quietly with the conductor half an hour later, when the fast express was speeding south, confiding his identity and stating what he wanted to

learn. Later, when the conductor came through the train to punch the tickets, he paused briefly and whispered to the detective:

"He has a return ticket to Philadelphia. The date shows that it was purchased day before yesterday."

Chick thanked him and now paid his fare.

"It's Philadelphia for mine, also," he remarked, smiling significantly. "I was all at sea as to where I was going. I'm glad to find out."

The conductor laughed quietly, and moved on through the train.

It was long after midnight when Chick shadowed Bailey from the Pennsylvania Station, in Philadelphia, to a second-class hotel in Arch Street, where his quarry evidently already was quartered, for he stopped only for a key and several letters, which the clerk took from a pigeonhole and gave him, and he then went up to his room.

Chick entered a moment later and registered under a fictitious name.

"Was that Tom Denny who came in just ahead of me?" he inquired carelessly.

"No." The clerk shook his head. "That was Arthur Finley. I don't know Tom Denny."

"He's a traveling salesman with whom I'm acquainted. I thought I recognized him."

"You were mistaken. Mr. Finley has been living here for several months. He's a buyer for Rudolph Meyer, who runs a general fancy-goods store in Broad Street."

Chick turned away and went up with a hallboy to the room assigned him.

"Buyer for Rudolph Meyer, eh?" he said to himself, with a feeling of grim satisfaction. "I'll wager that all of the goods with which he supplies Rudolph Meyer come indirectly from the store of Mantell & Goulard. I'll look into that in the morning, and then have a long-distance talk with Nick. His suspicions have hit the nail on the head, all right, and to-morrow should see something doing."

CHAPTER V.

NICK FINDS A CLEW.

Nick Carter did not receive the expected telephone communication from Chick the following morning. Bent upon learning why, and apprehending that something of a sensational nature had occurred the previous night, Nick called at the Lexington Avenue boarding house about half past eight and asked to see the landlady.

Mrs. Hardy joined him in her parlor a few moments later, drying her hands and arms with her apron.

"I have called to inquire about Mr. Lamont," said Nick, after closing the door. "I understand——"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Hardy interrupted, gazing. "That's more than I can say. I'm very glad if any one understands and will explain Mr. Lamont's conduct."

"Ah!" Nick replied, smiling. "I thought something had occurred. I probably can explain to your entire satisfaction. What about Mr. Lamont? What mystifies you?"

"Well, sir, he engaged a room here last night and left his suit case, saying he would return in about an hour. He did not go so, nor have I heard from him. I have telephoned to a gentleman to whom he referred me, and who stated that he is entirely reliable."

"You probably refer to Mr. Calvin Page, his uncle."

"Yes, sir, I do. But I cannot account for Mr. Lamont's disappearance. Do you know anything about him?"

"I know all about him, madam," said Nick. "Did anything occur here last night that might have occasioned his absence?"

"Well, no, sir; nothing occurred in the house."

"Outside, perhaps?"

"I know only that one of my boarders, Helen Bailey, was assaulted by a man about eleven o'clock as she was approaching the door. A stranger ran across the avenue and drove the miscreant away, then pursued him around the corner. Neither of them returned. I don't think the stranger was Mr. Lamont, however, for he don't answer Miss Bailey's description of her protector."

"Chick in another disguise," thought Nick. "The game opened even more quickly than I expected."

Mrs. Hardy then was gazing at him quite suspiciously, and Nick decided to take her into his confidence. He briefly explained the situation and the probable circumstances, much to the woman's relief and increasing interest in her visitor, whom she now regarded in an entirely different light.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "I did not even dream, Mr. Carter, that you were the famous detective. I don't think Miss Bailey even suspected that her protector was one of your assistants."

"Did she say anything more about the matter than you have stated?" Nick inquired.

"No, sir; only what I have told you."

"You must not do so, then, nor mention what I have told you," Nick directed, more impressively. "Say nothing whatever about the matter to any one."

"But, Mr. Carter, your instructions come too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes, sir. I already have told one man."

"Whom have you told?"

"Mr. Gaston Goulard."

"How did you happen to inform him?" asked Nick, both surprised and suspicious.

"He called here this morning. He frequently stops with his automobile when on his way to business to take Miss Bailey to the telephone exchange. She had gone before he arrived, however, and I then told him about Mr. Lamont, thinking he might know the man, or suggest some explanation for his absence."

"Is Mr. Goulard friendly with Miss Bailey?" Nick inquired, with brows knitting slightly.

"Yes, sir, but only in a paternal way, I think. He is much older than she, and I imagine that he is interested in her only because of young Mr. Mantell, the son of his business partner. Mr. Mantell is deeply in love with Helen."

"What did you tell Mr. Goulard about the assault?" Nick inquired.

"Only what I have stated to you."

"That her assailant was pursued by the stranger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you tell him that the stranger did not return?"

"I did, sir."

"What did Mr. Goulard say about that?"

"He appeared quite disturbed."

"What did he say?" Nick repeated.

"Well, I don't think I remember," Mrs. Hardy faltered. "He said nothing that made any impression on me. He asked whether Helen recognized the man, or gave me a

description of him. When I had told him all I knew about the matter, he rushed out to his automobile and rode rapidly away with his chauffeur."

"More rapidly than usual?"

"Yes, sir; much more. To tell the truth, Mr. Carter, I felt almost sure that he suspected the man's identity."

Nick thought so, too, but he did not say so. He at once suspected, also, that Goulard had hastened to the telephone exchange to question Helen Bailey, and ten minutes later he entered in disguise and confirmed his suspicions. Revealing his identity, of course, he learned from Helen that Goulard had questioned her very closely about the man who had pursued her brother, and that he then had hurriedly departed.

"Does he know that you were arrested yesterday morning, Miss Bailey, and for what?" Nick then inquired.

"Yes, sir; he does," said Helen.

"Who informed him?"

"He read about it in one of the newspapers."

"Did he question you about it?"

"Yes, in a general way, Mr. Carter," Helen readily admitted; then added more earnestly: "But he appeared much interested in what occurred last evening."

"Quite likely," said Nick, a bit dryly.

He decided not to reveal any of his increasing suspicions, however, but returned immediately to his business office, where he found Patsy Garvan awaiting him, and told him what he had learned.

"That listens good to me, chief," declared Patsy, with some enthusiasm. "It's dead open and shut, now, that Chick has a line on Bart Bailey."

"Undoubtedly."

"But why haven't we heard from him?"

"Circumstances may have prevented him from communicating with us, or he may be seeking additional evidence before doing so," Nick rightly reasoned.

"Mebbe so," Patsy agreed. "But what's eating Goulard? Why was he so haired up over it? Is he in love with Helen Bailey?"

"That evidently is one reason," said Nick. "She denies that she has given him any encouragement, however, beyond accepting a ride to and from her place of business occasionally. She states that he has always treated her respectfully. I would not care to trust Goulard with such a girl, nevertheless, much farther than I could throw him."

"Nor I, chief, as far as that goes," said Patsy. "I don't half like his looks."

"There may be a more serious cause for his being haired up, as you term it," Nick added.

"You refer to the robberies?"

"Exactly."

"You think he may be the man behind the gun?"

"I begin to think so," said Nick. "It is quite possible that he is engaged in a big scheme to defraud his own partner. You observed last evening, no doubt, that he was quite anxious to know what investigations I intended to make, and he insisted that I must keep him informed of my progress."

"You bet I noticed that," said Patsy. "It is significant, too, as far as it goes."

"Very true. Even if my suspicions are correct, however, it may not prove easy to fix such treachery upon one of the firm and to round up his confederates."

"That's right, too."

"But there is one fact on which we can depend, and of which we can take advantage."

"What is that, chief?"

"Only four persons are supposed to know that we are engaged on the case," said Nick. "They are the two members of the firm, also Frank Mantell, and the assistant general manager, Mr. Lombard. I directed that no one else should be informed."

"I remember," nodded Patsy.

"Now, if either of them has a hand in these robberies, he will evidently reason that the thefts must not abruptly cease, or we would immediately attribute it to the fact that we are making an investigation and the crooks have become alarmed. That would, of course, involve one or more of the four men who know we are looking into the matter."

"Sure thing," agreed Patsy. "That's as plain as twice two."

"Undoubtedly, therefore, the thefts will continue," Nick confidently predicted. "It is up to us, then, to catch the thieves in the act, or at least discover who is doing the work and how the goods are removed from the store."

"Gee, we ought to be able to accomplish that," said Patsy.

"We will undertake it, at all events, while Chick is following up Bart Bailey. Slip two or three changes of disguise into your pocket, Patsy, and go to the department store. Find Goulard, and keep an eye on him till otherwise directed."

"I'll do that, all right, but what are your own plans?"

"I'm not sure what turn they will take," said Nick. "I shall follow you to the store in disguise and look over the ground. What I observe may determine what more I shall do."

"I see."

"Be that as it may, I shall run across you and then may have other instructions to give you."

"I've got you, chief," said Patsy, hastening to make ready. "May I act on my own judgment, in case I detect anything suspicious?"

"Certainly," Nick nodded. "Do nothing, however, that would expose our hand."

"I'll guard against that, chief."

"Go ahead when you are ready, then, and keep a sharp eye on Gaston Goulard."

It was nearly noon when Patsy entered the vast department store, where the morning business then was in full swing, all of the several floors being thronged with customers.

"I'll probably find Goulard in the business office, or in that locality," he said to himself, then bent only upon locating his man. "I'll have a look in that direction."

Though familiar with the store in a general way, Patsy knew but little about its numerous departments. Fortune favored him, however, in that he sauntered toward the rear of the store and unexpectedly discovered the man he was seeking.

Goulard was hurrying up from one of the basement rooms in company with a clean-cut, florid man of nearly fifty. Both appeared disturbed. Goulard was talking excitedly and flourishing several foreign invoices, the character of which Patsy readily detected.

"Gee, I'm playing lucky," he said to himself. "There is something doing already."

He followed the two men to the second floor, on which

the extensive offices were located, including the private offices of the firm and assistant managers. All were in the rear of the vast building, but adjoined the extensive salesroom, which enabled Patsy to follow the two men without attracting attention.

He saw them enter the nearest of the several private offices, which were divided by a corridor from the large general office, and a moment later Goulard's hard, aggressive voice could be plainly heard through the partly open door.

"There is no question about it, none whatever," he declared. "Lombard is right, Mr. Mantell. Two of the Persian shawls are missing. I have checked off every article found in the packing cases, and Tenney, the receiving clerk, is positive that none was mislaid. The invoice is correct in every particular, save that two of the Persian shawls are missing. There goes another two hundred dollars to the dogs. By Heaven, I'll close the store, or sell my interest in it, if this kind of thing continues."

"Another theft," thought Patsy, pausing at the entrance to the corridor. "The chief was right, by Jove, in that the robberies will continue in spite of us. That must be the senior partner's private office."

The last was confirmed by the reply to Goulard's heated declarations.

"Don't lose your head, Gaston. You suffer no more than I over these depredations. We are equal partners in the business. Bear in mind that we now have Nick Carter on the case, and he——"

"Carter be hanged!" Goulard interrupted bluntly. "Why hasn't he showed up this morning? If he——"

"Give him time," put in another voice, which Patsy recognized to be that of Frank Mantell. "You know, Goulard, what he stated last evening."

"Stated!" snapped Goulard. "He didn't state anything. He said only that he would look into the matter. Why isn't he doing it? Close that door, Lombard. We may be heard in the salesroom."

Patsy heard the door closed, and the voices of the men within no longer reached his ears. It was obvious to him, however, that they were discussing a robbery committed that morning, evidently from a package of imported merchandise that had been opened in the receiving room.

Bent only upon watching Goulard, as Nick had directed, Patsy waited briefly within view of the office door, toward which he presently sauntered, noting that the corridor ran toward the rear of the building and to a narrow, diverging corridor and stairway leading down to a court making in from the side street.

"I'll wait and see where he goes after leaving Mantell's office," he said to himself, not venturing to play the eavesdropper at the closed door. "He probably will return to the salesroom, or some other part of the store. Ah, this must be his private office."

It was the last in the corridor, and a plate on the door bore Goulard's name. The door was partly open, and Patsy glanced in, pausing for a moment. He saw a handsomely equipped office with a large roll-top desk, then open and covered with accumulated letters, bills, and invoices.

Turning into the diverging back corridor, which afforded him a corner for concealment, Patsy then observed that another door led from Goulard's office into the rear corridor, a fact which did not then impress him seriously.

He scarce had turned the corner, however, when he heard the steps of the two men in the other corridor. They were coming in his direction, and discretion at first impelled him to dart toward the back stairway, as he could not plausibly explain his presence in this rear corridor, which was but little used and only by persons employed in the store.

Lingering for a moment, nevertheless, Patsy heard the men suddenly stop at the door of Goulard's office. They remained in whispered conversation for several minutes, inaudible to Patsy, though he then heard one of them walk quickly away through the main corridor, while the other entered Goulard's private office.

Patsy heard the door closed and the steps of the man within, and he still lingered and listened.

"Is it Goulard himself?" he questioned mentally. "Who else would be in his office? I must find a concealment from which I can watch the other door."

Patsy found it under the rise of stairs to the third floor, a dusty corner from which he could see a portion of both corridors.

He had been waiting about ten minutes, when, much to his surprise, another man emerged from Goulard's office and appeared in the back corridor.

He was a bowed, round-shouldered man in a gray suit, and entirely unlike the fashionable garments worn by the junior member of the firm. He appeared to be about sixty, a man with grizzled hair, a full beard, and wearing steel-bowed spectacles. He paused for a moment, glancing sharply toward the stairs, and then he closed the rear door from which he had come and hastened toward the stairway.

"That beats me," thought Patsy. "I'm sure there was no one in that office when I looked into it, and who but Goulard would have entered it? Who the dickens is this fellow, then, and why——"

Patsy did not continue his train of thought. He decided that the matter needed immediate investigation. He darted to the rear door of the office again and listened.

Not a sound came from within.

Stepping around to the other door, bent upon knocking and learning positively whether Goulard was within, Patsy now found on the door a written card:

"Will return at two o'clock."

"Great Scott!" thought Patsy, startled. "That wasn't here when I passed this door. Can it be——"

He did not end the thought. He turned abruptly, darting through the rear corridor and down the back stairway, now in hot pursuit of the bearded man in gray.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CODE TELEGRAM.

Chick Carter was on the lookout for Bart Bailey at seven o'clock the following morning, after trailing him to Philadelphia. He had felt sure that his quarry would not be stirring before that hour, but he soon found that he had allowed himself but little leeway. For Bailey appeared in the hotel office ten minutes later and hurried in to breakfast.

Chick saw plainly that the rascal did not suspect an espionage, but his haste denoted that he had important business in view. Chick determined not to lose sight of him, therefore, and he deferred for that reason and in

order to gather additional evidence, a telephone talk with Nick, precisely as the latter had inferred.

Chick shadowed Bailey from the hotel about eight o'clock, and the store mentioned by the clerk the previous night. It proved to be a small establishment, occupying only the ground floor and basement of a corner building, with an office in the rear, and to which the crook immediately hastened.

"I'll not follow him," thought Chick, sizing up the store from outside. "I may get a line on him from the rear."

Hastening in that direction, Chick saw that the back windows of an automobile agency overlooked a paved area back of Meyers' store, and he entered and introduced himself to the manager, confiding the situation to him and requesting the privilege of using the rear windows.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Carter," he readily consented, after Chick had concluded. "Go as far as you like. I wouldn't bank much myself, as a matter of fact, on Rudolph Meyers' integrity. I know he used to run a pawnshop in one of the lower precincts of the city. He opened this store about eight months ago."

"Soon after the New York robberies began," Chick nodded.

"I see the point. I have often wondered why he could sell goods cheaper than his competitors. I inferred that his rent might be lower, and he keeps only one clerk, a man named Finley."

"Many of his goods cost him less—at present," Chick said significantly.

"I judge so, now," smiled the other. "They unpack most of them in the area back of the store. A big case came in there this morning by express. It now is out there. I suppose they will open it, now that Finley has showed up. Yes, by Jove, they're just coming out of the rear door."

Chick directed the manager to remain in his office, and he then stole to a point from which he could easily see and hear the two men without being detected.

They had emerged from a back door of the store, and had opened another leading down a flight of stone steps to the basement. Barton Bailey already was working upon a large packing case, while Rudolph Meyers, a short, swarthy man of about fifty, stood looking on with a sinister grin.

"Another vindfall, eh?" he remarked, after a moment. "Another vindfall. If it proves to be as good as the last——"

"Much better, Meyers, and then some," Bart Bailey interrupted, turning from his work. "I happen to know just what is in this one. I was with Murdock when the goods were packed."

"You left him all right, eh?"

"As right as a trivet, Rudolph."

"Not one is yet wise, eh?"

"Not yet, old man, nor likely to be," declared Bart confidently. "The headquarters dicks have been bounced and others are to be tried. You know whom I mean. They're the worst ever, too, but I reckon they'll find this nut too hard a one for their ugly jaws. If they——"

"Wait!" cut in Meyers sharply. "Here vas a poy with a message. Vait von minute."

Chick pricked up his ears and crept nearer the window. Through the open back door of the store he could see a telegraph messenger entering from Broad Street. He saw Meyers hurry in to meet him, saw him glance at the address on the yellow envelope, and then turn and beckon to Bailey, who dropped his tools and hurried into the store.

"By Jove, I wonder what that signifies," thought Chick, with instinctive misgivings. "A wire to Bailey, eh? Can any one have got wise to my doings?"

Bart Bailey, to whom the telegram evidently was addressed, hastened to sign for it, and then broke the seal. He read the message, and then both men hurried into the rear office.

Chick then could see them through one of the office windows, which had been opened to admit the morning air.

Bart Bailey took a small leather book from his pocket and sat down at a desk, spreading the telegram on it and seizing a large pad of blank paper and a pencil. He then began to refer to various pages in the book, pausing to write briefly at intervals on the pad.

"A code message," thought Chick, intently watching the couple. "He has the key to it in that book, and is making a transcription on the pad. By Jove, this looks like something doing."

Chick's suspicions were almost immediately confirmed. Both men appeared much disturbed. Leaving Barton still at work at the desk, Meyers hurried to the front part of the store, where, through some lace draperies that were displayed in one of the windows, he began to peer cautiously into Broad Street, evidently searching the wide thoroughfare in each direction.

"By gracious, I must be right," Chick muttered. "Bart Bailey has been tipped by some one, as sure as death and taxes. The other rat is looking to see whether the store is being watched. You're looking in the wrong direction, old man. By Jove, I would give a trifle for a copy of that transcription."

Bart Bailey evidently completed it a few moments later. He sprang up in some excitement, tore the written sheet from the pad, then hurried out to the front of the store to read it to his companion. Both remained there, earnestly discussing it and gazing cautiously toward the street.

"Here's my chance, by Jove, if I ever had one," thought Chick, after watching them for a moment. I'll take it, too, let come what may."

Stepping quickly to one of the other windows, Chick quietly raised it, then sprang out noiselessly and crossed the area between the two buildings. The desk in the rear office was within reach through the open window.

Chick leaned over the sill and listened for a moment. He could hear the subdued voices of the two men in the front of the store, but could not distinguish what they were saying.

Taking the pad from the desk, Chick drew back and tore off the upper blank sheet and slipped it into his pocket. He then replaced the pad and returned it to its former position, quietly closing the window. The two men in the front of the store still were cautiously watching the street.

"Neither of them heard me," thought Chick, with some satisfaction. "Nor will a single blank sheet be missed from that pad. I'll wager I can learn something from it."

One might wonder how he could accomplish it, but Chick Carter was wise to all the tricks of his profession. He thanked the manager of the agency for the accommoda-

tions afforded him, cautioned him to say nothing in regard to his visit, and he then learned the location of the nearest drug store.

Hastening to it, Chick bought from a clerk some fine black powder adapted to his purpose. He then requested the privilege of using the prescription room for a few moments, stating with what object, and the favor was readily granted.

Chick then spread the blank sheet of paper on a table and covered it with a thin layer of the fine black dust, which he then blew gently from its surface.

Particles of it remained, however, in the indentations caused by the pressure of the pencil through the sheet on which Bart Bailey had been writing, and it brought out quite legibly nearly every word of the transcription hurriedly made by the crook.

Chick read it carefully, quick to readily interpret the condensed phrases transcribed from the code book, and he found that it fully confirmed his suspicions.

It told him that Bart Bailey had been warned that a detective was following him; that he must watch out for him and lure him to New York, if possible, and to some place designated only as a cobweb. The communication bore no signature whatever.

Chick Carter smiled a bit grimly, now knocking the particles of dust from the sheet and returning it to his pocket. The circumstances, nevertheless, puzzled him somewhat.

"Who the dickens could have learned of my doings and warned this rascal?" he said to himself. "Not Helen Bailey, surely, nor the boarding-house landlady. Neither of them would have done so. I'll be hanged if I now can fathom it, but I reckon I see my way to doing so. Lure me to New York, eh? I can guess what that means, all right. Well, I'll give the rats a chance."

Most men would have shrunk from the risks involved, but not Chick Carter. He now hastened to find a second-hand clothing store, where he clad himself in a somewhat seedy suit and a woolen cap, directing that his own discarded garments should be sent to his New York address.

Ten minutes later, wearing an entirely different facial disguise and having a rather sinister appearance, Chick returned to Broad Street and entered Meyers' store.

He then found both suspects engaged in hurriedly putting into various shelves and drawers the goods taken from the packing case, which had been opened during his brief absence.

Both at once ceased working when he entered, and Chick saw that he was instantly suspected. He saw, too, that Bailey shot a swift, significant glance at Meyers, plainly directing him not to interfere.

"Is the boss around?" Chick inquired, as he approached them.

Bart Bailey nodded, hooking his thumbs through the armholes of his vest, while he replied inquiringly:

"I am the boss, my man. What do you want?"

"I'm looking for a job, sir," said Chick, respectfully touching his cap with his forefinger. "I thought, mebbe ——"

"That I would give you employment?" Bart put in, with searching scrutiny. "What led you to think so?"

"Nothing, sir, save that most stores need help," Chick explained, quite humbly. "I have been trying for a job in others, sir, but luck seems against me. I'm broke and in hard sledding, you see, and——"

"Do you live in the city?" Bart cut in again.

"No, sir. I'm here from Chicago only a couple of days."

"Why did you leave there."

"My boss failed, and that threw me out of a job. I couldn't get another in Chicago, so I worked my way here on a freight train."

"What sort of work can you do?"

"Any old kind, sir, that'll earn me a dollar," Chick asserted, somewhat suggestively. "I wouldn't be particular. You can bet on that."

"You'd do 'most anything, eh?"

"That's what I would, sir. When a man's up against it good and hard, he don't stick over trifles. I'd do anything the boss told me."

"Suppose it was something off color?"

"That would be up to him, sir. I'd do it, all right, and shut my eyes to what it was about."

"And your mouth, too, perhaps?"

"I would, sir, and keep it shut," said Chick, with a sinister nod. "You can bank your pile on that, sir."

Bart Bailey laughed and glanced again at the listening merchant.

"Murdock might use the fellow," he remarked significantly.

"Vell, yes, he might," Meyers allowed tentatively, evidently taking a cue the other had given him.

Bart turned to Chick again, saying:

"We've got no use for you here, my man, but I think I could find a job for you in New York."

"That would suit me all right, sir," Chick declared, with manifest eagerness. "I'd go to New York, sir, or to perdition, if need be. Give me a letter to the party, sir, and I'll find a way to get there."

"I'd do better than that, my man, if you mean what you say," replied Bailey, glancing at his watch.

"You'll find I mean it, sir," Chick insisted.

"I'm going to New York in just half an hour," Bart added. "I'll not promise you the job, mind you, but I think I can fix you with a friend who wants a man for general work. I'll take the chance, at all events, and will pay your fare, which can be returned to me out of your first week's pay. How does that suit you?"

"I couldn't be hit more to my liking, sir," said Chick, with manifest gratitude. "I'm more obliged than I could tell if I——"

"Never mind thanking me," Bart interrupted. "There'll be time enough for that after you get what's coming to you. What's your name?"

"James Donovan, sir."

"Where are you stopping? Have you got any luggage?"

"Only what's on my back."

"Well, that's easily carried," Bart laughed, with a covert gleam in his shifty eyes. "Sit down there, Donovan, for about ten minutes. We then shall have time to hit a fast express."

Chick obeyed him with alacrity, taking a chair to which the rascal pointed.

There was nothing remarkable in the celerity with which these arrangements were completed. Chick knew that the two crooks did not dream of his having learned of the code telegram and its significance, and that they not only would suspect his identity, but also would see in his

application for work only a scheme to watch them and the Philadelphia store.

That he would walk with open eyes into such a net as the telegram indirectly suggested would seem utterly improbable, and Bart Bailey had immediately seized the supposed opportunity which the situation presented, feeling sure that he could trap Chick before he could learn that his identity and designs were suspected.

Half an hour later, therefore, found both seated in the smoking car of an express train bound for New York, whither Chick had really expected to have taken the crook in irons, instead of traveling as his supposed dupe.

This appeared to Chick, nevertheless, the surest and speediest way to discover the identity and doings of Bailey's confederates, as well as to round up the entire gang, which might possibly be perverted by the immediate arrest of Bailey and Rudolph Meyers.

It was early afternoon when they arrived in New York, each having played his part consistently, resulting in no material change in the situation, save a change of base.

"We'll take a taxi," said Bailey, as they emerged from the station. "I've got the price."

"That beats working one's passage on a freight train," Chick replied. "Whatever you say, Mr. Finley, goes."

"This way, then."

Chick followed him to a taxicab, to the driver of which the crook quietly gave his instructions.

The taxicab stopped in front of an unpretentious store in one of the crosstown streets. The single front window denoted that wooden toys and novelties of like description were sold within. A sign over the door apparently told the whole story:

"ACME NOVELTY COMPANY."

Chick glanced at the sign and window when he followed Bart Bailey from the taxicab. Beyond the low brick building in which this store was located, the two upper floors of which were evidently used for a dwelling, towered the rear wall of a vast mercantile edifice, which Chick immediately recognized.

"Mantell & Goulard's department store," he said to himself. "By Jove, this should signify something."

"This way, Donovan." Bart Bailey spoke with a growl. "Get a move on."

Chick did not hesitate. He followed the ruffian without replying, and entered the quarters of the Acme Novelty Company.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO A NET.

Chick Carter sized up the interior of the store with a glance. He saw that it was not used for a retail business. Several empty cases stood on the floor, while a nondescript array of toys and novelties of cheap variety filled the shelves and single counter, all more or less dusty and in some disorder.

The only visible occupant of the place was a burly, powerful man of middle age, with reddish hair and features, and with his shirt sleeves rolled above the elbows of his brawny arms. He was clad in overalls and appeared to be engaged in drawing nails from a cover of one of the empty cases.

"Hello! Back again, Finley?" he exclaimed, in guttural tones, when the two men entered, at the same time bestowing an indifferent glance upon Chick.

"Yes, Nolan, but only for the day," Bart Bailey replied. "Is Murdock around?"

"He's in the basement."

"Good enough! I hoped I would find him here. Shake hands with Mr. Donovan. He's looking for a job, and I have an idea that Mr. Murdock can use him."

"I reckon that we can use him, all right," Nolan vouchsafed, with covert significance. "We want to get the right kind of a man."

"I think I can fill the bill," said Chick, while he shook the other's tendered hand.

"Wait here, Donovan," put in Bailey. "I'll find out what Murdock thinks about it."

"Go ahead, sir," Chick nodded.

Bart turned to the rear of the store and vanished down a narrow stairway.

"What kind of work is to be required of me?" Chick inquired, turning again to Nolan,

"Odd jobs," was the indefinite reply. "Mostly packing the stuff we send away. We don't do any retail business."

"Does Mr. Murdock run the business?"

"When he's here," nodded Nolan. "He's the big finger."

"Where does he buy all of these things?" Chick inquired, glancing at the counter and shelves.

"Don't buy them," said Nolan tersely. "We make most of them. We've got a workroom in the basement."

"I might——"

What Chick would have said was cut short by a shout from below, a command from Bart Bailey.

"Bring Donovan down here, Nolan," he cried. "Murdock wants to talk with him."

"All right," Nolan shouted; then, to Chick: "I'll turn the key in the door. Some one might steal in and swipe something."

He strode to the street door and locked it while speaking, and Chick quick to note the significance of all this, seized the opportunity presented. He shifted a revolver to the side pocket of his coat, then followed Nolan down the narrow back stairway.

It led to a basement room of moderate size, with a cement floor and lighted with several incandescent lamps. In none of the four foundation walls that met Chick's gaze was there any sign of a window. In one corner, however, a stairway led up to another part of the building.

Near one of the walls stood a long, wooden bench, covered with tools and partly finished articles such as Chick had seen in the store. Aside from this bench, two common wooden chairs and a bare table, the room contained no furnishings worthy of mention.

A workman with his sleeves rolled up, a muscular chap in the twenties, was leaning on the bench with a mallet in his hand.

Bart Bailey was seated on a corner of the table.

Near by, occupying one of the chairs, was a bearded, round-shouldered man in gray—the man whom Patsy Garvan had followed from the department store only a short time before.

Nolan stepped aside to let Chick pass, and the latter quickly noticed that he did not return to the store. It was too significant a fact to be ignored, and Chick was never more alert than at that moment.

"This way, Donovan," Bailey said, a bit curtly. "Here is Mr. Murdock. I have told him about you. He wants to ask you a few questions."

"All right, sir," said Chick. "Glad to know you, sir."

"Very good. Sit down, Mr. Donovan."

Murdock pointed to the only vacant chair. It was directly in front of him, and scarce three feet away. He sat with his imposing figure bowed slightly forward, with his hands spread on his knees. He had spoken agreeably, but his voice had a hard ring and his eyes a shifty gleam that further put Chick on his guard.

He sat down, as directed, replying respectfully:

"Thank you, sir. I'll answer any questions you ask."

"Very good," said Murdock. "Finley tells me you are out of work and came from Chicago."

"I did, sir."

"What were you doing there?"

"I worked in a hardware store."

"Are you handy with tools?"

"Quite so," Chick nodded, wondering how the situation would turn. "I have worked as a carpenter at times, though I never learned the trade."

"You don't look like a man accustomed to hard work," said Murdock, smiling through his heavy beard.

"I've done my share, sir, for all that."

"Let's see your palms. They will tell the story."

Chick hesitated for only the hundredth part of a second. He now knew what was coming, that the rascal suspected he was gripping a weapon in his side pocket, of which he aimed to make him let go. Chick reasoned on the instant, too, that he was up against desperate odds, that his best move would be to yield to the rascals temporarily, biding his own time to discover their entire game and to turn the tables on them. All this really was no more than he had expected and designed, when he boldly entered the place in spite of the risks involved.

Chick hesitated only for an instant, therefore, and then extended both hands and displayed his palms, as directed.

As quick as a flash, bending forward from the table on which he was seated, Bart Bailey clapped the muzzle of a revolver to the detective's head.

"Don't move!" he commanded, with sudden sharp ferocity. "Keep them there, or you'll be a dead one. We want your hands where we can see them."

Chick dropped them on his knees and drew up in his chair. Without so much as a glance at Bailey, and apparently not the least disturbed by his weapon, he gazed at Murdock and asked coolly:

"What's the meaning of this? What's it all about?"

Murdock's eyes took on a more venomous gleam and glitter, his voice a more threatening ring.

"You know what's it all about," he said sternly. "If you stir foot or finger, you'll get all that Finley has threatened. You are playing a tricky game and a dangerous one, for it cuts no ice with us. We know you, Carter, and are out to get you—as you're out to get us!"

Chick coolly removed his disguise and tossed it upon the table.

"That being the case, Mr. Murdock, I'll sail under true colors," he said curtly.

"You may as well," Murdock rejoined, with a sneer. "But don't get gay, Carter, or you'll pay the price. Keep your hands on your knees."

"Don't be alarmed," Chick retorted. "I'm not inviting a bullet by opposing you. Do what you like."

"We intend doing so," snapped Murdock. "The mistake you made, Carter, was in undertaking to oppose us. You now find yourself neatly trapped."

"Oh, not as neatly as you imagine," said Chick. "You have had nothing on me."

"Nothing on you, eh?"

"Only what I have voluntarily handed you."

"Rats!" cried Bart Bailey, with a snarl and scowl. "Tell that to the marines. I've made a monkey of you, Carter, and you know it."

"It's not in you, Bailey, to make a monkey of me," Chick replied, with a scornful glance at him. "It's you who were monkeyed last night, when I picked you up in Lexington Avenue and trailed you to Philadelphia, with you none the wiser."

"That's insignificant," said Murdock, checking Bailey with a gesture. "We know all about that. We know just how it was done."

"Certainly you do," Chick coolly allowed. "I was aware of that several hours ago."

"Aware of what?"

"That you knew a detective had trailed this rascal to Philadelphia."

"You knew it several hours ago?" demanded Murdock suspiciously.

"Yes."

"I guess not."

"Punk!" snarled Bailey derisively. "That's rot! How could he know it?"

"You have another guess, Murdock," added Chick, not averse to mocking and mystifying the rascals, in spite of the risk it involved. "I assume, too, that you are the man who sent him the information."

"How sent him?" Murdock sharply demanded, evidently rendered apprehensive by Chick's repeated assertions.

"It was sent in a code telegram."

Murdock's heavy brows knit like frowning battlements over his threatening eyes. He drew forward in his chair, searching Chick's face more intently.

"How did you learn of that?" he cried, while Bart Bailey looked as if he had been hit with a club.

"I have methods of my own, Murdock, for getting such information," Chick replied. "For obvious reasons, however, I do not reveal them to crooks."

"But how could you interpret a code message even if you saw the telegram?"

"Easily."

"Impossible, unless——" Murdock turned sharply to Bart Bailey. "Has that code book been out of your hands?"

"Not on your life," cried Bart emphatically. "This is all a bluff. He's got you on a string. He don't know half of what he asserts."

"Don't I?" questioned Chick, glancing at him again. "I know that you were directed to look out for me, Bailey, and to lure me to New York, if possible, and to a place designated in your code book as the cobweb. This, of course, is the place."

Murdock uttered an oath, evidently staggered and more alarmed by what he had learned.

"Bolton," he cried harshly, turning to the man with a mallet, "search this infernal meddler. I'll find out whether he's an infernal mind reader, or has a copy of our code in his possession."

Bolton hastened to obey.

Chick laughed indifferently, and Murdock fiercely added.

with both hands clenched in front of the taunting detective.

"If you knew all that, Carter, why have you walked into this trap?"

"Does that surprise you?"

"It appears reckless, not to say absurd."

"I did it, then, in order to get a line on the identity of you scamps, and to learn just how you are playing your knavish game," Chick bluntly admitted.

"Oh, is that so?"

"Exactly so."

"Well, then, you shall learn," snapped Murdock fiercely. "It will cost you your life, but you shall learn. I'll make it a point to satisfy your foolhardy curiosity. You shall learn—but at the cost of your life."

"Suppose we make a beginning, then," said Chick, a bit sharply. "Let's both sail under—true colors."

He reached up quickly while speaking and seized Murdock's grizzled beard, giving it a violent jerk. It came away in his hand, as Chick had suspected, revealing the hard-featured, smooth-shaved face of—Gaston Goulard.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT IN A CORNER.

Patsy Garvan was hit with an idea, of course, when he started in hot pursuit of the man in gray. He suddenly suspected, having seen him come from the back door of Goulard's private office, under the circumstances already described, that this grizzly bearded fellow was none other than Gaston Goulard himself.

Patsy realized, moreover, that the investigations he had made after the suspect's hurried departure, might prevent his overtaking him, and that was the thought uppermost in Patsy's mind when he plunged down the rear stairway in pursuit of him.

He brought up in a paved court back of the vast building. It made in from a side street, and was used chiefly for the receiving and shipping of merchandise from the store. It adjoined the broad doors of the two great basement rooms devoted to these branches of the vast business.

Several wagons and teamsters then were in the court, but there was no sign of the man Patsy was seeking.

"He surely came this way," he hurriedly reasoned. "He must have gone to the side street, too, for the other end of the court brings up against a wing of the building. I'll take that chance."

Patsy took it vainly, however, darting in that direction. He could not discover his quarry in the side street, in spite of his hurried, far-searching scrutiny. It then became a question as to which direction the man had taken.

"He would have gone through the store, of course, if heading for Sixth Avenue," Patsy continued to reason. "That would have been the nearest way, and he appeared to be in a hurry. It's odds, then, that he went the other way, and it's that way for mine."

Patsy started off again and walked for nearly a block, gazing sharply in every store, including that of the Acme Novelty Company, but he finally was forced to admit to himself that he had lost his man.

"Gee whiz! it's tough luck," he muttered, pausing and then turning back. "I'll eat my hat, crown and brim, if that wasn't Goulard himself. Why the dickens didn't I hook onto that idea on the jump? I then could have trailed him without sweating a hair. There's nothing for me, now, but to return and tell the chief, when he shows up in the store."

Slowly retracing his steps, however, Patsy lingered for several moments here and there, still hoping to discover his quarry.

A taxicab was approaching from Sixth Avenue. It stopped suddenly at a store on the same side as Patsy, and some thirty feet from where he then was standing.

A man sprang out, quickly followed by another—and Patsy then felt a thrill shoot up his spine.

"Holy smoke! that's Chick in disguise, as sure as I'm knee-high to a grasshopper," he said to himself, while he watched both men hurry into the store.

"I know that disguise as well as I know his own face," Patsy went on mentally. "He was on Bart Bailey's track, and it now is a hundred to one that he has some job on the rascal. The other must be Bailey himself. Great guns! I'm getting wiser every minute. Now it's a thousand to one that Goulard went into that store, or why has Bailey gone in there? Gee! the boot may be on the other leg. This may be a job to get the best of Chick. That may be Goulard's hurried mission from the department store."

Patsy had reasoned it out correctly, in spite of his meager information of the actual circumstances.

Bart Bailey had, as a matter of fact, sent Goulard a message in response to the code telegram, and had informed him of his designs.

Patsy was not slow in acting upon his suspicion, nevertheless, though he took care not to interfere with whatever Chick might have up his sleeve. He sauntered by the store, glancing up at the sign and through the window. He passed just in time to see Nolan turn back after locking the door, and then vanish with Chick down the rear stairway.

"That don't look good to me," thought Patsy, brows knitting. "Why did he lock that door? Chick evidently knew it and stood for it. He must know what he's doing, therefore, but he may slip a cog in some way. I'll not butt in, but I'll be hanged if I don't do a bit of nosing around on my own hook."

Patsy sauntered by the store again, and now saw plainly that it was unoccupied. He then moved on and crossed the street to survey the two upper floors.

"Some one lives up there," he muttered. "It may be the kink I saw in the store, or some one else employed there. I'll not risk asking any questions. Gee! I might get next in that way."

Patsy was hit with another idea. He had discovered an open alley leading to the rear of the building. He also had discovered a stonemason at work in the alley, engaged in pointing up portions of the brick wall of the next building. He was at work with a bucket of mortar and a trowel.

Patsy made a short detour and presently paused at the entrance to the alley.

"Hist!" he called quietly.

The mason turned quickly, a ruddy young Irishman, and Patsy signed for him to come out and follow him. They met a few rods away a moment later, out of view from the windows above the suspected store.

"What d'ye want?" questioned the Irishman curiously.

"Slip into the saloon here and I'll tell you," said Patsy. "I'll also buy you a drink, or whatever you fancy."

"Faith, and I can stand that, all right," grinned the Irishman.

Patsy led the way to a rear room of the saloon, where he gave a waiter an order, and he then proceeded to explain his project to his companion, revealing his identity and his relations with Nick Carter.

"I wish to size up that building next to the one on which you are working, Grady," he said, having learned the other's name. "I must do so without being suspected. I can get by, all right, if you'll lend me your duck blouse, overalls, and hat, and remain here under cover while I get in my work."

Grady grinned.

"In other words, Mr. Garvan, you want to take my place," said he.

"Exactly. I'll slip you a five-dollar note for it, Grady, and——"

"You kape the five bucks in your pocket, Mr. Garvan," Grady warmly interrupted. "Faith, who wouldn't do that much for Nick Carter! If you get into these togs as quick as I come out of them, you can be at work with me trowel in the shake of a lamb's tail. I'll hide here with my trap closed, be it long or short that you're gone. That goes, too, by these five fingers across."

"You're all right, Grady, from your toes up," replied Patsy gratefully. "Take it from me, all the same, you'll get yours for this."

Patsy sauntered out of the saloon in about five minutes. Only a close observer would have detected his subterfuge. One who had seen Grady at work would merely have supposed that another mason had taken his place.

Patsy devoted very little time, of course, to pointing up the brick wall. He began, instead, while pretending to be at work, a furtive inspection of the walls adjoining the basement to which he had seen Chick and Nolan descend. He could find, however, no window lighting the underground room.

"Gee! that's mighty strange," he said to himself. "Have they been stoned up for some reason? I'll be hanged if I don't think this crib figures in some way in the department-store robberies. I reckon I'll go a step farther."

Patsy already had found that a rear door and stairway led up to the dwelling over the store of the Acme Novelty Company. He could observe no one at any of the windows, however, and he felt quite sure that he could stealthily enter the place.

"If seen by any one, I can say I came in to ask for some water for my mortar," he said to himself. "I'll take the chance."

Mounting the two low steps outside, Patsy found that the door was locked, also that the key had been removed.

"That simplifies it," he muttered. "I can pick this lock like breaking sticks."

He accomplished it with a picklock in half a minute. Quietly opening the door a few inches, he gazed into a narrow hall and at a bare stairway leading upward. A door in the right wall some ten feet away also met his gaze. He paused briefly and listened.

Not a sound came from within. The hall was as silent as if the building was deserted.

Patsy stepped in and closed the door, leaving it unlocked, lest he might have occasion to retreat hurriedly.

The closing of the door left the hall and stairway in darkness—barring a single thread of artificial light that now caught his eye.

It was a vertical thread in the side wall, some two feet from where he was standing.

"Electric light," thought Patsy, listening again. "The store is not lighted. Nor does the store run back as far as this. The door leading into the store from this hall is farther in. There must be a lighted room back here, all the same, or this chink—by gracious, it's a panel door."

Thrusting his nails into the crevice through which the light had shone, Patsy had felt a section of the wall slip noiselessly to one side, revealing a secret panel so skillfully constructed as to defy ordinary inspection.

It revealed, moreover, something of far greater significance.

A flight of steps led down to a brightly lighted basement in the extreme rear of the building. It was walled in like a tomb, however, with no sign of a window.

On the cement floor stood a large horizontal engine of peculiar construction, so peculiar that Patsy could not imagine for what it was used, or why it was there.

Near by on a rack was a metal cylinder about two feet long and ten inches in diameter. Each end had a movable metal cover. Around both ends, moreover, was a flange of thick felt.

On a narrow table near the farther wall, one of them spread open evidently for inspection, and so placed that its folds hung nearly to the floor, lay two costly Persian shawls.

The instant Patsy's gaze fell upon them, the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed mentally. "The two shawls mentioned by Goulard. He did not bring them here, however. There is a connection between this cellar and the department store. That's a dead open-and-shut cinch, and it's operated in some way with this engine. By gracious, I'll have a closer look, if it takes a leg!"

Patsy had seen, of course, that this subterranean chamber then was deserted. Placing the panel exactly as he had found it, Patsy crept down the steps and gazed around.

"I have it," he muttered. "This interior wall has been built across the original basement so as to form this chamber, and at the same time prevent detection by persons in the other part of the basement, who would naturally suppose it extended back no farther than this inner wall. It must be to the other part of the basement that Chick descended. He still must be there, too, unless——"

That there was no alternative, that his suspicions from the outset had been correct, that he had trapped himself also, and was up against a sudden, desperate situation—all flashed over Patsy on the instant, when his train of thought was broken by sounds that sent a momentary chill down his spine.

The quick opening of a door, the heavy tread of men's feet, mingled with a harsh, commanding voice, which he instantly recognized to be that of Gaston Goulard—these were the sounds that suddenly fell upon Patsy's ears.

"Open that panel door, Bolton, and give us more light," Goulard was crying. "Lug him up here, Nelson, and be quick about it. Lend him a hand, Bart. We'll hide the infernal dick in the engine room till we can dispose of him. Work lively. I must phone to Lombard and make sure that all is well before I return."

"Great Scott!" thought Patsy, before half of the [illegible]

going was said. "I'm in wrong, all right, against odds which—hang it! here's my best chance."

Patsy had caught sight of the Persian shawl hanging over the side of the table. As quick as a flash, dropping to the floor, he rolled under the table and back of the folds of the shawl, which for a moment, at least, served to shelter him like a curtain.

He scarce had accomplished this and checked the slight disturbance of the hanging shawl, when the panel flew open, and Nolan and Bart Bailey roughly rolled Chick Carter, then bound hand and foot, down the flight of steps to the engine-room floor.

"Lie there, blast you, until we're ready to hand you something more," Bailey cried, with a snarl. "Meddle with our business, will you? We'll send you to the devil for it."

"Leave him there," snapped Goulard sharply. "Leave him there and close the door. Wait here, you three, while I phone to Lombard. There's no telling what these Carters may have done, or will do. I'll find out in a couple of minutes."

Patsy heard his strident voice even after the panel door was closed. He also heard him rush through the hall, evidently to a telephone in the rear part of the store.

Patsy did not wait to hear more. He whipped out his knife and rolled from under the table, giving Chick, who was only a bit bruised by his fall down the steps, the surprise of his life.

"Eureka! You here, Patsy?" said he quietly.

"Bet you!" muttered Patsy, quickly cutting Chick's bands. "I'm a Charley on the spot, for fair."

"Is there a way out?"

"Only up these steps."

"Thunder!"

"Tight box, old top, eh?" declared Patsy, undaunted. "But we have been in just as tight before."

"Yes, and then some." Chick nodded, springing up. "Have you got two guns?"

"Sure!"

"Let me have one. The rats have taken mine."

"No sooner said than done," grinned Patsy, handing Chick one of his revolvers and retaining the other. "What next? Shall we make a break at once and nail them in their own trenches, or——"

"Wait!" Chick interrupted. "Find the switch key that cuts off these lights. The rascals will fight back, but they could not get a line on us in the dark. We can get them at that advantage."

"I'm wise," said Patsy, vainly searching for the electric switch key.

"Be quick," whispered Chick, crouching at the foot of the steps. "Hi—ah, there's something doing. Something is wrong."

A roar from Gaston Goulard had reached his ears, a fierce oath, followed by:

"There's the deuce to pay! I can't get Lombard on the phone. He has been arrested. There's a chance, by thunder, that guns will show up here at any moment. Gag that infernal dick in the engine room, then put out the light. Fix——"

"Perdition! We're already fixed!"

Bart Bailey had thrown open the panel door and suddenly discovered the two detectives.

"Hands up!" Chick shouted, starting up the steps. "Up with them, or——"

"Hands up be hanged!"

Bart Bailey leaped aside, seeking the shelter of the wall, then whipped out a revolver and fired through the doorway.

The bullet whizzed a foot over Chick's head.

"Out with the lights, Patsy!" he shouted. "Smash the bulbs!"

Patsy's revolver swung upward like a flash.

There was a crash of breaking glass—and the subterranean chamber was in darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

BY THE AIR LINE.

Nick Carter arrived early that afternoon in the big department store of Mantell & Goulard, and several circumstances determined, as he had predicted to Patsy that morning, the course he afterward shaped.

One was the fact that, for the reasons already presented, he had received no communication from Chick and knew nothing about his movements.

Another was the fact that he could find no sign of Patsy Garvan in any part of the great store.

A third was the fact that Gaston Goulard was absent from his office, and that his whereabouts was unknown, as Nick learned upon talking with Frank Mantell and his father, which he then had decided to do, and both of whom he found in the private office of the senior partner.

Nick then learned, too, of the theft that had been committed in the receiving room that morning, about which Goulard had expressed himself so forcibly after apparently vainly investigating it.

Nick smiled a bit grimly after gathering these several points, and now suspicions began to arise in his mind.

"Have there been previous thefts from the receiving room, Mr. Mantell?" he inquired, addressing the elder.

"Yes, many of them; very many," was the reply.

"Who has charge in that room?"

"A man named George Tenney."

"Reliable?"

"I feel absolutely sure of it. He has been in my employ for a long time."

"He evidently is being duped in some way, then," said Nick. "He looks after the opening of all packages that are received, I suppose, and sees that their contents are sent up to the salesrooms."

"Yes, of course, with the occasional help of Goulard, or Mr. Lombard."

"They were both in the receiving room this morning, I think you have stated."

"They were, Mr. Carter," bowed Mantell. "They went down to investigate the theft."

"Was either of them there before the theft was discovered?"

"Yes. Mr. Lombard went down to check off an invoice of the package from which the two shawls are missing."

"I see," Nick remarked. "I think I will go down there, Frank, and look around a bit. Show me the way as far as the stairs, then leave me, and pay no attention to my doings. I may have something to report a little later."

Frank Mantell arose to obey, and Nick accompanied him down to the ground floor.

As they were turning toward the stairway leading down

to the basement receiving room, Frank touched the detective's arm and said quietly:

"There goes Lombard, now. I think he is going down to the receiving room."

Lombard was heading for the stairs with a wrapped bundle about a foot long and nearly as large in diameter, but he did not see Mantell and his companion.

Nick watched him for a moment, then said quietly:

"Leave me, Mantell. I can find the way by following him."

Nick had more than one object in doing so.

He arrived at the head of the stairs just as Lombard turned to the left in the great basement room.

Nick darted down after him, and again fortune favored him. He reached the entrance to the room, which was always partly filled with unopened packages of divers descriptions, just in time to see Lombard glide stealthily back of a high pile of cases about two feet from one of the walls.

Nick saw an empty case about ten feet to the right of the door. He crouched behind it and waited.

Less than two minutes had passed when Lombard returned—without the bundle.

He quickly reached the stairway and hurried up to the business part of the store.

Nick Carter's eyes had a sharper gleam when he crept from his concealment. He at once gave his attention to the narrow passage in which Lombard must have left the bundle.

One side was formed by the high pile of cases.

On the other was a sheathed wall.

Nick examined the cases in rapid succession, and he soon found that none of them could be opened. Obviously, none could be a hiding place for the bundle.

Nick then began a careful inspection of the wall, sounding it foot by foot by tapping it with his knuckles. He suspected, of course, that there might be a secret panel with an open space behind it.

Presently he found a spot that sounded more hollow than other sections.

"By Jove, I think I'm right," he muttered. "But there seems to be no crack or crevice. The panel, if there is one, is most cleverly concealed."

Persistently searching the wall, however, Nick finally discovered the head of a nail some six feet above the floor. It did not appear to be as dusty as the rest of the wall. He reached up and pressed it with his thumb.

This instantly brought a faint click from behind the sheathing.

A section of it about two feet square, so neatly fitted that the cracks were invisible, separated from the rest and swung outward under the impulse of a hidden spring.

It brought to light the foundation wall of the building, also a circular metal plate about fourteen inches in diameter, with a handle by which it could be swung downward parallel with the face of the wall.

Nick forced it down and discovered the opening of a tube through the wall, and in the tube a cylinder such as Patsy had seen in the subterranean chamber.

Nick instantly hit upon the truth, of course, and the mystery as to how the merchandise had been taken from the store ended then and there.

"A pneumatic tube," he said to himself, noting the tight-fitting flange of felt around the end of the cylinder. "Similar to those of a cash system. The tube evidently runs underground to another building, where there must be an engine and air pump for removing the air from the tube. That done, and this plate lowered, the cylinder would fly through the tube in an instant."

Nick carefully noted the probable direction of the tube, then turned a knob in the metal end of the cylinder, from which he took, as he expected—the bundle seen under Lombard's arm only ten minutes before.

Nick closed the tube and panel, then took the bundle up to Mr. Mantell's private office, where he found both father and son.

"By gracious, Nick, there has been another theft," Frank Mantell cried, when the detective entered. 'A pair of costly lace curtains is missing from that department."

Nick did not care for any particulars. He sat down in one of the large leather chairs and placed the bundle on the floor behind it.

"That's too bad, Mantell," he remarked. "I would like to question one of your managers. Send for Mr. Lombard, since we happened to notice him a few minutes ago."

Frank Mantell looked surprised, but hastened to obey.

Lombard entered in about five minutes, apparently apprehending nothing.

Nick had removed his disguise and thrust it into his pocket.

"Sit down, Mr. Lombard," said he, without waiting to be introduced. "I am told there has just been another mysterious theft in this store."

"Yes, so I have heard," was the quick reply. "I was just going to look into the matter."

"Don't you think it would be more profitable to look into that pneumatic tube that leads out of the receiving room?" Nick inquired.

Lombard turned as white as his shirt front.

"I don't know what you mean," he faltered. "What—what tube?"

"That in which I found this bundle a few minutes ago," said Nick, taking it from behind his chair and tearing it open. "Here are the stolen lace curtains. I refer to the tube, Mr. Lombard, in which you placed them."

Lombard started to rise, but his knees gave way under him and he nearly fainted in his chair, while Mantell and his father stared in speechless amazement.

Nick leaned forward, and, before Lombard fairly knew it, snapped a pair of handcuffs on the culprit's wrists.

"Now," said he, more sternly, "tell me where that tube leads, Mr. Lombard, and be quick about it. The jig is up for you and your confederates."

Lombard pulled himself together and glared at Nick with a scowl.

"You'll learn nothing from me," he growled bitterly. "Find out for yourself, if you want to know."

"That's precisely what I will do," declared Nick, starting up. "Look after this man, Mantell, till I return. I have a hunch that I shall not return alone."

Nick did not wait for a reply, but seized his hat and hurried from the office. He had noted the probable direction of the underground tube, and he hastened through the corridor and down the same back stairway over which Patsy had pursued Gaston Goulard.

"Humph!" he ejaculated, upon arriving in the court. "It runs under these pavements and into the basement of this next building. I'll find out who occupies it."

Nick hurried out to the side street and gazed up at the sign: "Acme Novelty Company."

"Novelty, indeed," thought Nick, trying the door and finding it locked. "No one at home, eh? I'll slip around and try the back door."

He had arrived nearly at the entrance to the alley, when he caught sight of a policeman on the opposite side of the street. He whistled and beckoned him over.

"Come with me, Doyle, and have your gun within easy reach," he said quietly.

"Something up, Mr. Carter?" questioned Doyle, at once recognizing the detective.

"Yes," Nick nodded. "I don't know yet, however, how big game we may find."

"Sure, I don't care how big, sir."

"Follow me through the alley, then, and——"

Nick stopped for an instant only.

There had reached his ear a sound, though a bit muffled, which he instantly recognized—the sharp, spiteful crack of a revolver.

"Come on, Doyle," he snapped quickly. "That smacks of big game, all right. I reckon we're in the nick of time."

Nick was running at top speed through the alley while speaking, with the burly policeman close on his heels.

Ten seconds brought them to the back door of the building—which Patsy Garvan had left unlocked.

Nick then heard the shouts of men within, and the furious voice of Gaston Goulard.

"We've got them, Doyle," he said quietly, pausing for an instant. "Are you ready?"

"I'll go ahead, if you say the word."

"Not much!"

Nick turned the knob and threw open the door, shedding the bright daylight into the dim hall in which Goulard, Bart Bailey, Nolan, and Bolton were attempting with fierce threats to subdue Chick and Patsy, who had smashed the lamps in the subterranean chamber only a moment before.

Nick broke in upon them with his revolver ready, shouting sternly:

"Cut it, you fellows! Hands up, and——"

His voice was drowned by the crack of a revolver in the hand of the only man who ventured any resistance—that of Bart Bailey.

The rascal had crouched quickly back of Goulard, and had escaped Nick's immediate notice.

The bullet tore a hole in the detective's sleeve and inflicted a slight wound in Doyle's left shoulder.

Goulard sprang aside instinctively.

Bart Bailey was raising his weapon to fire again.

Nick's barked on the instant, and the bullet went true.

Bailey pitched forward on his face in the narrow entry, dead before he hit the floor.

There were curses and imprecations, but no further resistance, and the three remaining crooks were speedily handcuffed and started for the Tombs, the initiatory step in the retributive path. Meyers was arrested in Philadelphia half an hour later, and the round-up was complete.

The details of the crime, as they afterward appeared, were very nearly in line with which Nick Carter had been led to suspect. It was learned later that Goulard long had been hopelessly under water financially, having vast secret commitments in the stock market, and he confessed to having taken this method to rob his partner and repair his wasted fortune. He had gone far enough to nearly wreck the business, as a matter of fact, and the firm went out of existence a little later.

Commenting upon him and the case to his assistants shortly before the trial of the culprits, while seated with Chick and Patsy in his library, Nick Carter made several predictions which later proved for the most part to be correct.

"That rascal," he observed, speaking of Gaston Goulard, "carries the mark of Cain. He has begun with being a traitor to his own partner. He probably will do time for the crime, and then he will continue the downward path. It's odds that he will commit murder sooner or later. For, unless I am much mistaken, the mark is on him. The others will be convicted and sent to prison. As for Bart Bailey—well, let the dead bury the dead. His death has, at least, opened the way for Frank Mantell to win over the girl he loves, and they are well worthy of one another."

"That's right, chief," declared Patsy.

"I would wager," Nick added, "that they'll be married within the year."

THE END.

"A Network of Crime; or, Nick Carter's Tangled Skein," will be the title of the long, complete story which you will find in the next issue, No. 149, of the NICK CARTER STORIES. Then, too, there will be the usual installment of the interesting serial which is now running. There will also be several other interesting articles.

Sheridan of the U. S. Mail.

By RALPH BOSTON.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 148 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER IV.

A WARNING.

The more Owen thought over his interview with Boss Coggswell, the more convinced he became that the sole reason the politician had sent for him had been to try to bribe him to hold out the mail of a certain person on his route.

That Coggswell had summoned him to the club in order to express his admiration of Owen's independence in refusing to buy the ticket to the outing seemed absurd. It had sounded almost plausible when the boss had said it in his smooth, convincing voice, but when he came to think over it afterward, Owen could see how preposterous the thing was. Imagine any political leader going into raptures over a young man who had called him a blackmailer. Imagine him being anxious to help a young man to promotion, just because he liked his way of talking.

"No," said the carrier to himself, "that offer of a postal inspector's job was made to tempt me to do Coggswell's crooked work, and now that I've refused, I'll wager that he won't move a finger to help me. But I don't care about that," he added confidently; "I'll get there, all right, without his help."

Something happened the following morning which greatly strengthened the suspicions of the carrier, and

made him certain that Boss Coggswell had sinister designs upon the mail of some person on his route.

When he reported for work, Owen was informed by Henderson, the superintendent of Branch X Y, that, beginning that morning, he was to cover a new territory. Instead of route forty-eight, he would henceforth, and until further notice, cover route sixteen.

Now, in post-office work it is a great advantage, naturally, to have the carriers familiar with the territory which they have to cover. It stands to reason that a postman cannot make as quick deliveries over strange ground as on a route in which he knows the names in the house letter boxes almost by heart. For this reason the men are not changed around any more than can be avoided.

Therefore, Owen knew, as soon as Henderson told him that his route was to be changed, that this must be due to Coggswell's influence. The politician wanted to get him out of the way, and have him replaced by a man who would not refuse to do his bidding.

Owen inquired who was to succeed him on route forty-eight, and learned that it was a carrier named Greene, a man whom Owen liked less than any other employee of Branch X Y.

Greene, who was a pale-faced, shifty-eyed fellow, was a member of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association. Owen learned, and on friendly terms with Jake Hines. The fact that he had been selected for route forty-eight certainly looked significant.

To be taken away from his old territory was a great blow to Owen; for, be it remembered, the real-estate office of Walter K. Sammis was located in that section, and his transfer meant that he no longer would be able to exchange a few words each morning with Dallas Worthington.

And, besides this, the new route was a much less pleasant one. Carrier Greene, who had covered it for two years, had certain reasons of his own for being satisfied with it, but Owen found the new territory very disagreeable.

It comprised the very poorest and most squalid section of the district. The inhabitants were mostly foreigners, and the handwriting on letters they received was hard to decipher. They were in the habit of changing their addresses frequently, too, and this entailed extra clerical work; for each carrier has to enter all such removals in his "log book." Then, again, many of the tenants of the tenements were too shiftless or ignorant to post their names in the vestibules, and this made deliveries very difficult, and consumed a lot of time.

Nevertheless, Owen did not make any protest. He accepted the situation philosophically, and started out to cover his new route as cheerfully as if he really relished the change. But inwardly he registered a vow that he was going to find out the identity of the person whose mail Boss Coggswell wanted to get hold of, and check that politician's sinister plans.

First he went to the three carriers responsible for route forty-eight—for every route is covered by three men—and warned them of what he purposed to do.

The two other carriers who took turns at covering that territory were named Gordon and Smithers. They had both had route forty-eight for several years. The fact that they were not now taken off gave Owen reason to suppose that they must be satisfactory to Boss Coggswell, and willing to do his dirty work. For he reasoned that, in order to carry out his crooked scheme, the politician must have the coöperation of all three carriers who covered that route. Otherwise the particular letters which Coggswell wanted to get hold of might go through when Greene was not on duty.

Owen was on friendly terms with both Gordon and Smithers—in fact, the latter and he roomed in the same boarding house. The former was a good-natured, pleasant sort of fellow, but of a weak character. He was always heavily in debt, and he was a hard drinker. More than once he had been caught under the influence of liquor while on duty, and these lapses would have resulted in his dismissal from the department if it had not been for the intercession of Samuel J. Coggswell, who was a friend of his wife's father.

Smithers, like Greene, was a member of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association, and a crony of Jake Hines. He was a tall, sharp-featured young man, of about Owen's age, taciturn and very shrewd.

Owen felt sure that these men were all in the plot to tamper with the mails. As he didn't want to see them disgraced and sent to prison, he decided to give them due warning. Of course, they indignantly denied that any such proposition had been made to them by Boss Coggswell, or that they knew anything about a scheme to hold up anybody's mail on route forty-eight. Smithers told Owen that he must be raving mad to suspect anything like that; Gordon laughed and declared that it was the best joke he had heard in many a day; Greene growled that Owen was sore at having been transferred, and was trying to besmirch his character in order to get square.

"Very well," retorted Owen grimly; "I've given you fellows notice; now, if you go ahead and get caught, you've got only yourselves to blame. I know that there is such a crooked scheme afoot, and I'm going to find out the name of the victim and put him on his guard."

CHAPTER V.

A STRONG LEAD.

Owen began by watching Carrier Greene as he stood at his case sorting out the mail preparatory to starting out on the first delivery. He thought he might be able to see him withdraw and pocket the desired letters, and thereby get an important clew; but Greene made no such compromising move.

Owen maintained the same close watch when Gordon and Smithers were at the sorting cases, but these vigils were not productive of results. Either the letters which Coggswell wanted had not yet shown up, or the three carriers were too cautious to abstract them in the post office, preferring to wait until they had them in the bags and were out on the street, where they could get at them without being observed.

It was a headline on the front page of a morning newspaper which at length set Owen on the right track. This headline read: "Judge Lawrence to Fight Coggswell.—Former Supreme-court Judge Preparing to Wrest District Leadership from Boss at Coming Primaries. Coggswell Said to be Seriously Alarmed by Plan to Dethrone Him."

Now, part of postal route forty-eight was a row of

brownstone private residences, and in one of these lived the Honorable Sugden Lawrence, former supreme-court judge, and now a lawyer of considerable prominence.

Owen decided that this was the man whose mail Boss Coggswell wished to intercept. In the first place, if, as the newspaper stated, Judge Lawrence was threatening to wrest the district leadership from its present incumbent, was it not exceedingly likely that the latter would be anxious to "get something on" his prospective opponent—some scandal which could be used to crush the enemy? With such an object in view, secret access to a man's private correspondence would be a valuable factor. Many a family skeleton has been revealed by this means, many a public career has been ruined by means of a purloined letter.

In the second place—and this was, in his opinion, the strongest argument in favor of his theory—Owen happened to know that Henderson, the superintendent of Branch X Y, had a brother who was a clerk in Judge Lawrence's office.

Owen had wondered until now why Boss Coggswell, in his desire to tamper with somebody's mail, had not gone direct to Henderson, and had the thing done right in the post office, before the mail was handed to the carriers.

Surely, this would have been easier, and much more safe, than to deal with three subordinates. Several little incidents which had come under his observation gave Owen reason to believe that the superintendent of Branch X Y was not an overscrupulous official. He was a man who, in the administration of his office, "played politics" to an outrageous extent. Under ordinary circumstances, no doubt, he would not have hesitated to do Boss Coggswell this favor.

Why, then, had not the politician gone to Henderson instead of dealing with the carriers? Owen believed that he understood why, now. Coggswell was afraid that the superintendent would not stand for any monkeying with the mail of his brother's employer. He might have warned the judge and caused trouble.

Convinced that his theory was correct, Owen went that evening to the residence of ex-Judge Lawrence. The latter, a keen, aggressive man, a few years past middle age, received the letter carrier in his library, and listened with great attention to what he had to say.

When Owen was through, Judge Lawrence nodded his head vigorously. "I think you have guessed right," he said. "In fact, I haven't a bit of doubt that it is my mail which that rascal Coggswell is after. There is a certain incident," he went on, "concerning which I am now in correspondence with a certain person. While there is really nothing about this incident—nothing which could bring discredit on me if the real facts were known, the matter could be misrepresented in a manner which would greatly injure my reputation. I happen to know that Coggswell has a slight inkling of this matter already, and has been trying for some time past to get more information on the subject, so that he can spring it on me and smash me at the primaries. That is why I feel pretty sure that it is my mail he is scheming to get hold of."

He banged his fist vigorously upon the library table. "Tampering with Uncle Sam's mail is a pretty serious offense," he declared grimly; "and so friend Coggswell will learn, if he is engaged in such a contemptible piece of business."

He arose and held out his hand to Owen. "I am very grateful to you for having come to me and put me on my guard, Mr. Sheridan," he said. "I am going to take steps immediately to ascertain if our suspicions are correct. And if they are, you and I are going to put Samuel J. Coggswell in prison stripes."

CHAPTER VI.

JACK HINES IN LOVE.

"Say, Miss Peaches-and-cream, is the main squeeze in?" At this unconventional salutation Dallas Worthington looked up from her typewriter, and stared curiously at the person who had given utterance to it.

She saw that the visitor was a stout, red-faced young man, who wore a suit of exceedingly loud pattern, a soft felt hat of the very latest and most rakish design, and a red necktie, in which glittered a diamond of huge proportions.

"If by 'the main squeeze' you mean Mr. Sammis," she said, with dignity, "he is in his private office. Do you wish to see him?"

"That's what I came for—originally," answered the young man, staring at her ardently; "but now that I've seen you, I've almost changed my mind. I hate to tear myself away from this spot. Say, kid, you make a big hit with me. I didn't know there was anything so pretty in this vicinity. If I'd suspected it I'd have dropped in here long ago."

"What name shall I take in to Mr. Sammis?" inquired the girl coldly.

"Gee, but you're in a hurry to get rid of me!" said the visitor reproachfully. "Well, if you insist, you might tell the boss that Mr. Hines is here—Mr. Jake Hines."

As the girl arose and stepped into the private office at the rear of the store, Mr. Hines gazed after her trim, graceful figure admiringly.

"Peach!" he said to himself. "I'm mighty glad I called. Even if I don't sell any tickets here, my time won't be wasted. If I ain't taking this queen to Coney Island before another week has passed, I'm a dead one."

Dallas reappeared and told him that Mr. Sammis would see him immediately. With another ardent glance at her, Mr. Hines stepped into the private office.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" inquired the real-estate broker, an elderly man with gray mutton-chop whiskers and a rather severe demeanor.

"I've come to see how many tickets you'll take for the annual chowder and outing of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association," replied Hines.

"Chowder!" repeated Mr. Sammis testily; "I don't eat chowder, and I don't attend outings; consequently I don't want any tickets."

"Oh, yes, you do," retorted Hines, his tone almost bullying. "You don't have to go, yourself, if you don't want to. You can buy the tickets and give 'em away to your friends. Boss Coggswell expects you to take at least five, Mr. Sammis. That's the number all the other real-estate men in the district are takin'."

"I don't care what others are doing, and I don't care what Mr. Coggswell expects," snapped Sammis. "I must ask you to get out of here at once, young man. This is my busy day."

"Oh, very well," growled Hines, rising. "It don't make no difference to me whether you take any tickets or not, my friend; but take it from me, it's going to make a whole lot of difference to you. No man that's interested in property in this district can afford to antagonize Boss Coggswell. You'll be mighty sorry. There's lots of ways we can make it unpleasant for you if you get gay with us."

He swaggered out of the private office, and, as he caught sight of Dallas Worthington at her typewriter, the scowl disappeared from his beefy face.

"Say, bright eyes, how would you like to run down to the Island with me this evening?" he inquired, stepping up to her desk.

"I wouldn't like it at all," she answered, without looking up from her work.

"Stung!" he exclaimed ruefully. "May I ask why not?"

"Oh, for several reasons."

"Give me one."

"Well, for one thing," she answered, glancing at him scornfully, "I'd be afraid, Mr. Hines, that on the way you might try to intimidate me into buying a ticket for the Coggswell Association's outing."

"Gee!" he said to himself, "she must have overheard what I said to her boss inside."

Aloud he said earnestly: "You needn't be afraid of that. I'd make you a present of all the tickets you want, honeybud. Tell me another reason why I can't make a date with you."

"Because I don't make engagements with strangers," said Dallas haughtily. "Please close the door as you go out."

"It ain't my fault that I'm a stranger," said Mr. Hines plaintively, taking no notice of the hint. "I'm doin' my best to get acquainted. Say, give it to me straight, little one—am I on a busy wire? Is there any other feller ahead of me?"

"There is!" declared Dallas, with great emphasis. "And even if there weren't——"

"Then I'm sorry for him," the young man interrupted. "Sorry! Why?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Because I'm goin' to take his girl away from him. I don't know who the feller is; but whoever he is, he ain't good enough for you. I never took much stock before in all this talk about fallin' in love at first sight, but, honest, kid, you've hit me straight between the eyes. The minute I came in here and saw you sittin' at that typewriter, I——"

"Will you please close that door on the outside?" interrupted Dallas, pointing impatiently toward the street door. "I've got a lot of work to do, and if you don't get out of here immediately, I shall have to call Mr. Sammis."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Hines, somewhat crestfallen. "I guess that's a hint for me to be goin'. So long, girlie. I'll drop in again some other time when you ain't quite so busy.

"Gee!" he said to himself as he reached the sidewalk. "I certainly am hard hit. I do believe that I've actually fallen in love with that peach—and I don't even know her name."

A short distance up the avenue he encountered Carrier Greene.

"Hello, Jake," said the postman; "didn't I see you in Sammis' real-estate office a few minutes ago, talking to Sheridan's girl?"

"Whose girl?" demanded the politician quickly. "What Sheridan do you mean?"

"Owen Sheridan—the carrier that used to have this route," answered Greene. "Don't you know that he's keeping company with that typewriter girl? It's a fact. She almost cried, the other morning, when I came in and told her that Sheridan didn't have this route any more. I understand that they're going to be married soon."

"I don't believe it," growled Hines. "A queen like that goin' to marry a twelve-dollar-a-week carrier? It ain't possible."

Two evenings later, Mr. Hines, happening to be down at Coney Island with a party of friends, met Dallas Worthington on Surf Avenue, walking arm in arm with Owen Sheridan. The manner in which the girl was looking up into her escort's face caused Hines to utter an exclamation of jealous rage. For the young politician's infatuation for Dallas had proved to be more than a passing fancy. Strange as it may appear, he had seriously fallen in love with the girl, and the lapse of two days found him even more hard hit than at first.

Consequently, that meeting at Coney Island was a great blow to him. Until then he had refused to believe what Carrier Greene had told him, and, being an egotistical young man, he felt confident that, although the girl appeared to have somewhat of a prejudice against him at the start, she could not continue to hold out for long against the charm of his personality.

He returned home from Coney Island with the dislike which he had already formed for Carrier Owen Sheridan increased tenfold.

The next day he received a summons from Boss Coggswell to come to the clubhouse immediately. When he got there he found that politician in a state of considerable agitation.

"Have you heard the news?" exclaimed the district leader, pacing nervously up and down the floor of his private office.

"No, boss; what is it?"

"Carrier Greene has been arrested—and Tom Hovey, too."

"Tom Hovey! The fellow you sent to get those letters from Greene? What are they arrested for?" inquired Hines anxiously.

"Tampering with the mails, of course. I understand they've got them dead to rights, too. Greene was seen handing the letters to Hovey, and Hovey was caught in the act of opening the envelope over a steam kettle. Lawrence has got a strong case against us."

"Against *us*?" repeated Jake Hines, with a crafty smile. "Don't say that, boss. They haven't got anything on you—and you can rest assured that you'll not be implicated. Neither Greene nor Hovey will squeal, no matter what happens. I'm willing to stake my bottom dollar on those fellows standing pat. They'll go to jail for life rather than give you away. There's only one man we've got to fear, so far as you're concerned."

"Who's that?" inquired Boss Coggswell nervously.

"That letter carrier, Owen Sheridan. He's behind these

arrests, of course. It was him that put Judge Lawrence wise to the whole business."

Coggswell nodded gloomily. "Yes, and he can implicate me by testifying that I sent for him the other day, and tried to bribe him to hand over that mail. His evidence——"

"Will put you in stripes, boss, I'm afraid," broke in Jake Hines grimly. "But he's the only man we've got to be afraid of."

Coggswell agitatedly paced the full length of the room several times before he spoke again. Hines observed that the boss' ears were wiggling furiously—that peculiar physical indication of the sinister thoughts that were brewing within the crooked brain.

At length Coggswell halted. "You're right, Jake," he said, very quietly; "Sheridan is dangerous. He must be got out of the way."

Jake nodded his head vigorously. "I agree with you, boss," he said fervently. "He must be got out of the way."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRAME-UP.

Jake Hines couldn't forget what he had seen down at Coney Island the previous evening; the look of affection which had been in the eyes of Dallas Worthington as she gazed up into the face of Owen Sheridan; the trusting, intimate manner in which she hung on her escort's arm. Consequently Coggswell's declaration that the young carrier must be got rid of appealed to him tremendously.

He wondered just what the boss meant by those words. He was in hopes that the latter was about to propose some dark scheme for kidnaping Sheridan. To have the young man shanghaied and cast away on some desert island was a plan which, in his present jealous frame of mind, would have suited Jake to a T.

He made no suggestion, however. He waited for Coggswell to speak. He knew from the way those tell-tale ears were wiggling that the boss' fertile brain was busy hatching a plan to bring about the desired result.

After a prolonged silence, Coggswell said suddenly: "There must be no foul play, Jake—understand that."

"Eh?" exclaimed Hines, in incredulous astonishment. "No foul play?"

"No rough work, I mean," the boss explained. "No violence. You know very well that I don't like that sort of thing, Jake."

A look of disappointment flitted across Jake's beefy countenance. "What, then, boss?" he inquired.

"Sheridan must be silenced by legitimate means," declared the district leader. "We don't want to go against the law, Jake. We don't want to forget that we are decent, law-abiding citizens. I could not think of countenancing foul play in dealing with this man."

Hines scratched his head in perplexity, and stared blankly at Coggswell. He was relieved to see that, although there was a virtuous expression upon the latter's face, those ears were still wiggling at a furious rate.

"What do you mean by legitimate means, boss?" he asked.

"Let me explain, Jake." Coggswell sat down in his desk chair and motioned his disciple to a chair at his right hand. His agitation had now completely disappeared. Once more he was the calm, dignified, benevolent-appearing original of the portrait in oils which hung in the reception hall downstairs.

"Now, as you have correctly pointed out, Jake," he went on, "the only danger of my becoming implicated in this regrettable post-office affair is through the testimony of this carrier, Owen Sheridan. Greene and Hovey have been caught red-handed, it is true; but I agree with you that they are not the kind of fellows who can be made to squeal. They will deny emphatically that they were obeying my orders when they tampered with Judge Lawrence's mail. Hovey will insist that he had reasons of his own for wanting to see the contents of those letters."

Hines nodded. "Yes, I'm quite sure that both those fellows can be relied on, boss. Pretty tough, though, ain't it, that they'll have to go to prison?"

Coggswell smiled confidently. "They won't go to prison. They're quite safe. They'll be admitted to bail, of course, and I'll see that there's somebody to go on their bond, no matter what the amount—somebody who won't mind when the bail is forfeited after those fellows have skipped beyond the jurisdiction of the courts."

Hines nodded again. "Yes, that ought to be easy. And, now, how about Sheridan? How are you going to prevent him from dragging you into this mess?"

Coggswell smiled. "Let me answer that by asking you a question, Jake. Suppose you were on a jury, trying a criminal case: would you believe the testimony of a jailbird? Suppose the chief witness for the prosecution was a young man who had just been tried, convicted, and sentenced for being a thief: would you, as a juryman, take any stock in what he had to say?"

"I would not," declared Hines virtuously.

Boss Coggswell laughed grimly. "Very well, then; that's the answer to your question."

Hines looked bewildered. "But I don't quite get you, boss. Sheridan ain't a jailbird."

"Not yet, you mean, Jake," corrected Coggswell, in his quiet, smooth voice.

The eyes of the younger man suddenly lighted up. His was not a quick-moving brain, but he fully grasped the idea now. It appealed to him greatly, too. A prison was even better than a desert island, as a means of putting the kibosh on a rival in love.

"I get you, boss!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "We'll have to get busy and dope out a scheme for——"

"I've got one already, Jake," broke in the district leader smilingly. "One that can't fail to work successfully. All that you'll have to do is to carry it out."

For the next thirty minutes Jake Hines listened attentively while his chief explained in detail the plan which he had evolved. It was a plan which met with the former's warm approval and admiration, and when the interview was at an end, he went out with great enthusiasm to put it into execution immediately.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOUBTFUL JOKE.

Later that day, three well-dressed middle-aged men entered a branch post office, downtown, and stepped up to the registry window. Handling a small, square pack-

age through the grille, one of them said to the clerk: "I wish to send this by registered mail. It's a birthday present to a friend of mine. Is it sure to get there this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes," the clerk assured him, taking the package and making out a receipt; "it'll be uptown in an hour, and go out on the three-o'clock delivery."

Into the registered-mail sack went the little, square package, and soon it was on its way to the general post office.

Here the sack was opened, its contents rapidly sorted, and the little, square package placed along with several other packages, in a smaller sack which was sent speeding uptown to Branch X Y.

When Carrier Sheridan went to get his mail for the three-o'clock delivery, the little, square package was waiting there for him.

He glanced at the address curiously. Registered mail was a rarity on his new route, which, as has been stated, comprised the poorest and most squalid portion of the district. The package was addressed to a Mr. Michael Harrington, who kept a saloon. Owen put it in his pouch and started out on his delivery tour.

Fifteen minutes later he pushed aside the swinging doors of Harrington's saloon, at the bar of which was a group of about ten men.

"Howdy," said Mr. Harrington genially, from behind the bar. "What's the good word? Have a little drink of something, young feller? It's my birthday to-day, and I'm standin' treat."

"No, thanks," said Owen, with a smile; "I'm on the water wagon. But I wish you many happy returns, just the same. Maybe I've brought you a birthday present." He produced the small, square package, and his receipt slip. "Sign here, please."

"I guess it is a birthday present, all right," said the saloon keeper, holding out his hand for the registered package. "It looks as if it might be the gold watch which my friend Bill Warren telephoned me he was sending. Yes, that's what it is, all right. See, here's Bill's name written on the back."

He weighed the package in his hand. "Pretty light, though to contain a watch, ain't it?" he remarked.

"I should say so," said Owen.

Mr. Harrington hastily tore open the wrapper and revealed a thin pasteboard box. Opening this, he found a flat, leather-covered watchcase.

"It's the watch, all right," he said, turning with a grin to the group in the front of the bar. "Good old Bill. He's the most generous feller I know. Ain't it decent of him to have remembered my birthday like this?"

He pressed the button which released the catch of the watchcase, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment and disgust as the lid flew open.

"Empty!" he growled. "Now, what do you know about that?"

The group at the bar laughed uproariously. "The joke's on you, Mike!" cried one. "It'll cost you another round of drinks for being the goat."

The saloon keeper scowled. "I ain't so sure that it is a joke," he growled, with a suspicious glance toward the letter carrier, who was just going out of the door. "I know my friend Bill Warren ain't the kind of man to play a low-down trick like that on me. He wrote me that he was sendin' me a gold watch for a birthday present, and I believe he meant it."

He leaned over the bar and called to Owen: "Hey, you! One minute, there, young fellow!"

"Want me?" inquired the carrier, stepping back into the barroom.

"Yes. Are you quite sure that this here registered package ain't been tampered with?"

"I'm quite sure that it hasn't while it's been in my hands, and I think you'll find that the post office isn't to blame," replied Owen. "The government is mighty careful in the handling of its registered mail.

"But, of course, if you're suspicious," he added, "you can come around and see the superintendent and ask for an investigation. Before I did that, though, if I were you, I'd get into communication with the sender and ask if the case really contained a watch when he mailed it."

"That's a good idea," said Harrington. "I'll get Bill on the phone right now."

Although he didn't consider that it was really any concern of his, Owen waited while the saloon keeper telephoned, anxious to hear what the outcome would be.

A few minutes later Harrington turned from the phone, a grave look upon his face. "Just as I thought," he said; "it ain't a joke at all. Bill Warren says he's willin' to swear that he sent that watch—says he can produce two witnesses who saw him put the watch in the package, seal it up, and hand it in at the post-office registry window."

He hurriedly donned his hat and coat. "That watch has been stole—stole from the U-nited States mails. That's a serious offense. I'm goin' right around to the post office to make a complaint. All these gentlemen here are witnesses that the watch wasn't in the package when I opened it."

The following day Carrier Owen Sheridan was placed under arrest by two United States post-office inspectors.

"We want you, Sheridan," they said, accosting him in the doorway of Branch X Y, as he came back from his noon-delivery tour.

"Want me? What for?" he demanded, in great astonishment.

"For robbing the mails. No use throwing any bluff; we've got you dead to rights."

"I suppose this has to do with that watch which was missing from the registered package yesterday," said Owen calmly. "But why suspect me in particular? The package passed through many hands while in the post office."

"Yes, but only one pair of hands opened it and stole its contents," was the grim retort, "and those hands were yours, Mr. Sheridan. Otherwise, how could the pawn ticket have got into your trunk?"

"The pawn ticket?" repeated Owen blankly.

"Yes. We have just come from your boarding house. We went there to look your room over; and we found—this."

The inspector took from his pocket a pawn ticket for a gold watch, and held it before the astonished mail carrier's eyes.

"The watch this ticket calls for has already been iden-

tified as the watch which was stolen from the package, and we found this in your trunk. It looks very much as if you're going to exchange that gray uniform for a suit of stripes, Carrier Sheridan."

TO BE CONTINUED.

WILLIE'S MISTAKE.

Willie Jones had been warned several times for breaches of school discipline, and was at length reported to the head master, who gave him a final warning.

One night, not long after, Willie was again caught in mischief, and he felt that this time he was "in for it."

A flogging by the master was no joke, and Willie determined to make what preparation he could that the wind might be tempered to the shorn lamb.

On rising the next morning, he put on first his undershirt, then a layer of stiff brown paper, upon these a sweater, and over all a clean white shirt, borrowed from his chum, whose clothing was two sizes larger than his own.

Lastly he put on his coat and vest.

It was a very hot day in June, and at morning intermission Willie whispered to a friend:

"I'm nearly stifled. I hope he'll give it to me now."

But the master said nothing, and Willie went on stewing until dinner time.

He felt half inclined to dispense at least with the sweater before afternoon school, but fear of the master's cane deterred him.

All through the afternoon he suffered untold misery, mopping his face until his handkerchief would mop no more.

But a length, just before dismissal, came a messenger.

"The master would like to see Jones in his study."

On entering the study, the boy saw the supple, snake-like cane lying on the table.

"Well, Jones," said the master, "I can go on warning you no longer. You have brought this upon yourself. But as it is your first visit here for such a purpose, I shall make your punishment somewhat milder. Hold out your hand; four on each!"

HARD ON THE WARDEN.

A phrenologist who has been touring the country and giving lectures in the art, tells the following "good one" on himself: He was in the habit of inviting people of different avocations to come upon the stage, and he would dilate upon and expound the peculiarities of their cranial construction. He had come to that portion of his lecture where he dealt with the criminal form of the cranium, and addressed the audience:

"If there is any person present who at any time has been the inmate of a prison he will oblige me by coming upon the platform."

A heavily built man responded to this invitation

"You admit that you have been in prison, sir?"

"I have, sir," was the unblushing answer.

"Would you kindly tell us how many years you have spent behind prison bars?"

"About twenty years," unhesitatingly replied the subject.

"Dear, dear," exclaimed the professor. "Will you sit down, please?"

The subject sat down in a chair in the center of the stage. The professor ran his fingers rapidly through the hair of the subject and assumed a thoughtful expression.

"This is a most excellent specimen. The indications of a depraved character are very plainly marked. The organs of benevolence and esteem are entirely absent; that of destructiveness is developed to an abnormal degree. I could have told instantly, without the confession of this man that his life had been erratic and criminal. What was the crime for which you were imprisoned?"

"I never committed any crime," growled the man in the chair.

"But you said that you had been an inmate of a prison for twenty years?"

"I'm the warden of the prison."

NO MORE DUNNING.

The landlady of a certain medical student, who ineffectually dunned her delinquent tenant for some time, resolved at last upon resorting to extreme measures.

She entered his room one morning, and said, in a very decided tone:

"You must either pay me my rent, or be off this very day."

"I prefer to be off," said the student, who, on his side, was prepared for the encounter.

"Well, then, sir, pack up directly."

"I assure you, madame, I will go with the utmost speed, if you will assist me."

"With the greatest of pleasure."

The student thereupon went to a wardrobe, opened a drawer, and took out a skeleton, which he handed to the woman.

"What is that?" asked the landlady, recoiling a little.

"That! Oh, that is the skeleton of my first landlord. He was inconsiderate enough to claim the rent for three quarters that I owed him, and then—— Be careful not to break it; it is number one of my collection."

The landlady was growing visibly pale. The student opened a second drawer, and took out another skeleton.

"This—this is my landlady in South Street; a very worthy woman, but who also demanded the rent of two quarters. Will you place it upon the other? It is number two."

The landlady opened her eyes widely.

"This," continued the student, "this is number three. They are all here. A very honest man, and whom I did not pay, either. Let us pass on to number four."

But the landlady was no longer there. She had fled.

AN OLD LADY'S DILEMMA.

A friend of mine, who owned a pneumatic-tired bicycle, was explaining the different parts to his grandmother, who was paying him a visit.

He finished up the account by saying:

"And that little tube is where the air is blown in."

The old lady, who had never seen such a thing before, was very much puzzled.

"Wonderful!" she said, after a moment's pause of contemplation. "Wonderful! but do tell me, Sam, my lad, how on earth can you get your head in between the spokes to blow the air in?"

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Like Bull in the China Shop.

Oakville, Iowa, is a peaceful, prosperous, orderly town, but occasionally some strange thing happens, and one did the other evening. About eight o'clock, while the clerks in C. R. Walker's department store were busy about their evening work, they heard a noise in the rear of the storeroom, and, upon investigation, found that a cow which had been driven into town by some farmer had found an open door and had come into the store and proceeded to make herself at home. The clerks got busy at once, and when they attempted to drive bossy out, she became frightened, started to run, and fell sprawling on the floor, knocked over boxes, hardware, canned goods, dry goods, et cetera. By twisting her tail until it resembled a great auger, the intruder finally consented to pass out.

A Criminal Catcher.

For more than twenty years Joseph L. le Fors, of Sheridan, Wyo., has acted as detective for the Live-stock Association of Wyoming, and during that time has chased criminals all over the West and into Mexico.

Le Fors started as a cowboy in the Southwest. His brother was shot dead on the street of one of the early-day border towns. Joe heard of the deed, quit his job, came in, and quietly attended to the matter of his brother's burial. Then he got an officer's commission and went after the murderer, who was known as a "bad man." When the cowboy, in a spring wagon and without much knowledge of the roads in that vicinity, drove out of town on his mission, most of those who saw him guessed that he would not come back. But he returned, and after no great length of time. In the bottom of the wagon was the corpse of the murderer. Le Fors has never talked to any extent of that fight, except to say that he gave the man a chance and he lost.

Among the detective's most notable feats was the capture of Tom Horn, said to have killed seventeen men. Horn's quickness with a gun was marvelous, but when the test came, Le Fors proved too fast for him.

It is said that Le Fors had done more than any other man to make stock raising on the open ranges more than a mere venture.

Along Came Ruth, and Crash! See the Snakes!

When Miss Ruth Spencer, of Michigan City, Mich., accidentally tipped over a box containing Doctor John A. Dexter's collection of thirty snakes in his biology laboratory at Olivet College, Olivet, Mich., she created something of a panic.

Professor Dexter had been offering one dollar apiece for all varieties of snakes caught in Eaton County not already in his collection. The result was that he had rattlesnakes, blue racers, water snakes, garter snakes, and others reposing in a large box in his laboratory. The box stood on a high table.

Miss Spencer came in to the classroom looking for the professor, and, seeing the box, because curious to know its contents. She tried standing on tiptoe, lost her balance, and tumbled the snakes nearly on top of herself and all over the floor. With a scream she ran out of the room.

Meanwhile Professor Shedd was conducting a physics class in a room below, when suddenly a five-foot blue racer, which had crawled through the ventilator, dropped with a thud on his demonstration table. The class was automatically dismissed at once.

When Doctor Dexter arrived at his room, he recapturned most of the reptiles. But one blue racer, three garter snakes, and a small, black water snake are still at large in the science building.

Two Mountain Roads the Work of Convicts.

The Colorado Springs and Cañon City Highway and the Ute Pass section of the Pike's Peak ocean-to-ocean road, recently completed by Colorado's system of convict labor, are two of the most perfect mountain roads in the United States.

For twenty miles south of Colorado Springs the road winds around the foothills and mountains, practically the entire roadbed having been cut out of the hillside, and in many places blasted out of solid rock. For the remaining twenty-five miles the way is over foothills and through undulating country. Besides being a marvel in engineering, the road is one of the most scenic and picturesque in the West, passing as it does through Red Rock Cañon, Dead Man's Cañon, and many other mountain beauty spots.

The road averaged eighteen feet in width, and is perfectly crowned and drained. Although it offers a succession of climbs, so skillfully was the engineering work done that heavy grades have been eliminated, and the motorist is confronted with only one grade as high as three per cent.

The Ute Pass Road follows the ancient trail of the Indians across the Rocky Mountains. In the last few years that part of it between Colorado Springs and Cascade has been entirely reconstructed by convicts.

Under the Colorado system the convict is allowed ten days off his sentence for each month of labor on the roads. This is in addition to the usual reduction for good behavior.

Thomas J. Tynan, warden of the State Penitentiary, under whose supervision the work of the last three years has been done, estimates that in the next ten years five thousand miles of the best roads will be constructed at a cost of less than five hundred thousand dollars.

He says one thousand men have been used in road-work in the last three years at a cost to the State of twenty-five cents a day for each man. The men go about their work unguarded, and less than one per cent have violated their pledges and made successful escapes.

Wilson Gets Curious Bottle.

Fingal W. Anderson, who lives at Aitkin, Minn., has cunningly contrived a present which he has given President Wilson, and which the latter prizes highly.

Anderson has been ill and has whiled away weary hours in contriving his gift. It is a bottle into which he has

inserted a shield of the United States. Upon one side of it is a picture of the White House, and upon the other a picture of the president. In presenting the gift, Anderson said, in a letter:

"This is original, whittled after my own thoughts, during my illness from tuberculosis of the bone. This piece of furniture represents seventeen days of work with my jackknife and drill made by myself from wires and nails. In its construction there are 338 different parts, made from white pine and basswood.

"I am a young man, twenty-eight years old, born in Stockholm, Sweden, and am proud to be of the same race from which was descended John A. Johnson and John Lind.

"As sent to you, it is complete and set up in full. Please accept it with my compliments."

Death of Aged Woman Who Won War Record.

The death of Mrs. Virginia Taylor Gwynn, a war-time Virginia belle, widow of Captain Henry Gwynn, is announced at her home in Pikesville, Md., at the age of seventy-five.

Mrs. Gwynn often accompanied the Confederate army and led the troops into several engagements herself. She knew the country, and led detachments of the troops out of tight corners. For these acts she was mentioned several times in dispatches.

She volunteered to carry mail and dispatches from one division of the army to another, and to do this had to pass and repass through the Union lines several times. This attracted the attention of General Lee, and he publicly complimented both her great bravery and her beauty.

Captain Gwynn, her husband, was one of the few who succeeded in getting over the stone wall defended by the Union forces during the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg, when Pickett made his desperate charge.

His Jet-black Hair Turns Red in Night.

The sensation of the past week has been the extraordinary experience of Mack Stewart, a grocery merchant of Dublin, Texas.

Stewart is thirty-six years of age, and was the possessor of a head of jet-black hair, with the exception of a slight tinge of gray about the temples. To-day he is what might be termed a red-headed man. In a single night the pigment of black was supplanted by red, and glossy-black locks changed to a pronounced auburn.

Stewart, who was formerly a railroad conductor, attributes the remarkable occurrence to a most vivid dream he had recently. He says he dreamed that he was back at work on the H. & T. C. Railway. He was standing on the top of a box car, when, as the train crossed Chambers Creek, his head was struck by the top of the bridge, and he fell back, with the blood gushing over his face.

He awoke with a start and experienced a terrible pain in his head. The train, the creek, the bridge, and all the surroundings were as distinct as if he actually had been gazing upon them, and the pain was as severe as if he had really received a crushing blow.

Fifty or sixty physicians who have been in Dublin during the past week attending the Erath County and Frisco Central Medical Associations examined Stewart's hair, and there was not one who did not express his astonishment.

Instances of hair turning white in a single night on account of extreme fear, mental anguish, or nervous strain, have been known to occur, but cases of black hair turning to red are almost unheard of. They all expressed the opinion that it would eventually turn to white.

Mormons Increase Numbers.

There is no race suicide among the Mormons. The births during the year were more than four times as many as the deaths. The annual report gives these figures:

Net increase in the membership of the church, 129,493 for the period of 1901 to 1914; birth rate, 39.5 per 1,000; death rate of 8.3 per 1,000; marriage rate, 17 per 1,000.

The report shows the church collected $1,887,920 from tithes in 1914, of which $730,960 was expended on church buildings, $330,984 to maintain the church schools, $64,508 to maintain the Mormon temples, $227,900 for missionary work, $99,293 to maintain church offices, $136,727 to complete and maintain the L. D. S. Hospital in Salt Lake City, and $116,238 to the poor.

Largest Sale of Oil in Tank.

What is stated to be the largest sale of oil in tankage ever made was carried out when White & Sinclair sold seventy-two 55,000-barrel tanks of oil in the Cushing field, in Oklahoma, to the Prairie Oil & Gas Company. The tanks contained approximately four million barrels of oil. The price paid is said to be, including tankage, $2,400,000.

Shot at Black Cat; Never Touched It.

Daniel Taylor's notion of the proper manner for a black cat to conduct itself is to walk ever and anon in a straight line. If it turns in either direction, he is firmly convinced that it should be shot at sunrise, nightfall, or whenever the turn is made, and to show that he lives up to his convictions, he took a shot at a cat shortly before the milkman appeared on his rounds, missed it, and, about twelve hours later, paid twenty-five dollars for the error in the city court. If he had hit the cat, he says, it would have cost him nothing.

When Taylor was a year and a half old, he was taking a turn about the nursery, when a large cat, blue-black, walked in front of him. It stopped, he stumbled, and it took five neighbors to regain his teething ring, which he lost control of on the downward trip. From that day until one afternoon, at fourteen minutes after three, he has believed that a cat passing in front of him means hard luck. Now, however, he knows it.

"What have you to say?" asked the court, when Taylor was arraigned, charged with missing the cat.

"If I repeated what I have in my mind," replied Taylor, "I would be sent to Siberia. I missed that pestiferous cat, and I am sorry for it. I am a good citizen, but a poor marksman, and if I were not, I would be elsewhere now. If I ever lay hands on that blamed cat, your excellency, I'll manipulate her nine lives with éclat and finish. I'll count them over one by one, and——"

"You talk too much," said the court.

"Perhaps," answered Mr. Taylor; "but I have the advantage of knowing what I am talking about. I know that when a black cat passes in front of me, it means

hard luck, and, unless I kill it, misfortune will befall me. I know——"

"I fine you twenty-five dollars," said the court.

"I need say no more," remarked Taylor, counting the money out. "This proves everything."

Mr. Taylor lives in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Tramp's Meal Brings $10,000 to Donor.

Mrs. James Maner, living near Gilmore, Ga., on the Marietta car line, is planning a trip to Miami, Fla., to inspect a legacy valued at $10,000, left her by a tramp.

This does not lend itself readily to the fancy, but this time fancy will have to brace up and take it like a man. Truth may be more of a stranger than fiction, and all that, but the legacy is there, and traveling expenses for Mrs. Maner to go down and view it—fifty dollars in the hand, with a lot of legal assurance.

"Eight years ago," she said recently, "a man came limping into our front yard. He looked like a tramp, and then again he didn't look like a tramp—I mean, his clothing was ragged and worn, and he was limping from an injury to his foot, and yet he didn't have the manners of a tramp, if you could call them manners.

"The man was penniless, he said, and in trouble. I felt sorry for him. I took him in and gave him some dinner, and then ten cents to pay his way to Atlanta on the trolley line. He seemed very appreciative, and insisted on taking my name and address down in a little book."

It seems that the tramp did not lose the little book. And after eight years back came the bread from off the waters, only it was multiplied to a fold entirely out of step with scriptural precedent.

Mrs. Maner paid no attention to the first information that the legacy had been left her. It required an urgent appeal from a Miami lawyer and the proffer of traveling expenses to make her realize that an estate consisting of several houses and some land had really come her way at the expense of a dime, a good dinner—and a bit of the milk of human kindness.

Netty's Knitting Stunts.

Netty's knitting knickknacks for the soldiers.
Her nobby knack at knitting nets them neckties by the score;
Some natty soldier knockers would prefer some knickerbockers
To the knotty, knitted neckties Netty knits for necks galore.

For the enlightment of our readers who may not have heard about sister Susie, the following chorus is here presented:

Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers,
Such skill at sewing shirts our shy young sister Susie shows!
Some soldiers send epistles, say they'd rather sleep on thistles
Than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers sister Susie sews.

Little Maria Finds Friendly Protector.

Maria Greutzen, eight years old, fair-haired and shy, with a thick woolen shawl folded about her shoulders, started on a western journey from Ellis Island, New York, holding tight to the hand of her sister Hedwig. They had come all the way from Antwerp, in war-stricken Belgium, alone on their way to their aunt in Chicago with stout hearts, and tickets tied up in bright calico handkerchiefs. Maria had a stout paper envelope pinned on her little underwaist, with a little extra money for emergency.

It was all so bewildering. Little Hedwig winked back a tear now and then on the trip across the ferry, but then tears come easily when one has only five birthdays and is at the other end of the world from home. They must reach the "beeg train" at Grand Central Station without getting lost, and the kind man guided them and cheered them on.

That is what the men of the Immigrant Guide and Transfer are doing every day, lending a hand to children and grown-ups alike, for grown-ups are sometimes like children in the great, puzzling city. The Immigrant Guide and Transfer was organized some time ago with the approval and direction of Frederic C. Howe, commissioner of Ellis Island.

This worthy and useful organization is at present struggling under a great handicap. The decrease in immigration due to the war leaves it without income to meet the expenses of upkeep. Commissioner Howe is anxious, indeed, not to open the way for any such imposition and exploitation of immigrants as was practiced before the Immigrant Guide service was organized. Money was stolen from the newcomers, tickets were mixed up, exorbitant prices for subway tickets and other fares were extracted, leaving the travelers in a state of helpless panic.

Steps are being taken in this city to render any financial aid Guide and Transfer officials may need.

Spirits Sent Him to Dead.

Jim Thomas, fifty, negro, was arrested after a white man had seen him in the cemetery, in Gurdon, Ark., with a wheelbarrow, spade, and other tools. Examination showed that the negro had dug to the top of the box where James Buckley, a wealthy farmer, was buried three years ago.

The negro explained his actions by saying that spirits told him to communicate with Buckley.

Strange Discovery in Old-time Cliff Abode.

A freak quadruped of unknown species is the latest discovery in the fields of anthropological research in southern Utah. Dean Byron Cummings, head of the department of archæology in the University of Utah, who annually leads expeditions into the deserts of southern Utah and northern Arizona, recently dug up the remains of the mysterious animal of ancient times in an old-time cliff dweller's home.

The head and backbone of the animal was all that could be found, although the veteran research worker sought diligently to find other bones that might establish a clew to its identity. The cranium is similar to that of an ancient Indian, with sloping forehead and average brain capacity. On its skull was found a hank of wool resembling that of the modern sheep, and the part of the backbone that was intact, showing six vertebræ, was similar in most respects to that of the modern coyote.

Salt Lake scientists and students of other States have examined the strange find, but are at a loss to explain its identity. It is thought by some to be a freak offshoot of the sheep species, while others identify it with the human species.

Dean Cummings had difficulty removing the body from the cliff dwelling, his Indian guides and other native Indians objecting on grounds that the body might have contained one of their sacred good spirits. The find is now in the University of Utah museum.

"Bill the Bum" in Downy Bed.

The story of Mrs. Cook's adventure in the home of Mrs. Hodkinson, a neighbor, was much like the experience of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Both women are residents of San Francisco, Cal.

The Hodkinson family has been in New York for some time, and Mrs. Cook promised to look out for the house. She went there the other day to see that all was well.

She didn't know that "Bill the Bum," who says his address is Everywhere, was there in the role of Goldilocks. Bill had made himself at home there for three days. He had crawled through a basement window and had sampled things as he went along till he got to the top floor, where there was a nice cozy bedroom and a soft bed.

He had found bread and wine and was filled to contentment. Just like Goldilocks in the home of the Three Bears he had a fine time. Then he got sleepy and dozed off.

Mrs. Cook found him stretched out on a bed upstairs, snoring like a trooper. She tiptoed downstairs and called a policeman. The officer made so much noise climbing the stairs that Bill the Bum was awakened and took a header through an open window. He was captured after a chase, taken to the city prison, and charged with burglary. Among the things taken and not recovered are two cherry pies, three bottles of wine, and half a box of fine cigars.

Girl's in Men's Togs Foil Prison Guards.

Until three girls were arrested in Bridgeport, Conn., all of them wearing articles of men's clothing, it was not known that they had escaped from the New York State Reformatory for Women at Bedford Hills, Westchester County. They employed Harry Thaw's method of escaping, walking out the gate when the milkman opened it.

They told a remarkable story of hardships while being sought by police and guards in automobiles. They slept in woods and ravines during the days, and traveled and foraged at night.

The girls are: Ida Oakley, formerly of Danbury; Mildred Doyle, of Manhattan, and Alice Kilcoyne, of Brooklyn. They said they were about to be placed on a bread-and-water diet at Bedford Hills, and decided to escape. They had covered several miles in the prison garb of gray-and-white uniforms before their escape was discovered. They kept far back from the roads, and at noon hid in a ravine. At night they made a raid on a farmer's chicken coop, and, over an open fire, they broiled three chickens.

Early the next morning they made a raid on the clothesline of a housewife, and obtained enough clothes for Ida Oakley to discard her prison garb. Then, while the others hid in the woods, she went into the village and begged food and clothes, telling a story about a husband with tuberculosis and several hungry children.

In that manner they obtained plenty of food, but clothes were scarce, particularly women's garments. They obtained sufficient clothes for several men, but not enough for two women. Therefore they had to wear men's clothes. Mildred Doyle and Alice Kilcoyne, unable to get a skirt, wore men's trousers until they were in the outskirts of Bridgeport, when they met two young men in the road and explained their predicament. The men purchased skirts for them, but they had to continue wearing men's coats.

Their appearance in Bridgeport, where they tried to find work, caused comment, and they were arrested. Under questioning, they soon broke down and told of their escape from the Bedford Reformatory.

No Sentence in Eagle Case.

Although Edward Peffer got a verdict against State Game Wardens Charles and A. H. Baum for larceny of the eagle that he shot in Lewiston County, Pa., no sentence has been imposed on the wardens, and it is not likely that there ever will be. The judge of the court does not consider the verdict in keeping with the law as laid down by the State. The stuffed eagle is still in the State museum.

Mexicans Maltreat Rooster of Heroes.

Americans are not properly protected in Mexico, thinks Jo Conners, of Phoenix, Ariz. Conners believes that when a peaceful American in a foreign country is deprived of his wooden leg, the act should be construed as a declaration of war. Through the American State department he has applied for the return of a wooden leg, a steel foot, and four hundred dollars in gold, which were taken from him while he was a prisoner of the Carranza forces in Guaymas.

By profession Conners is a chronicler of heroes. He was employed by General Francisco Villa to prepare and publish a volume to be entitled "Heroes of Mexico." Villa furnished him with an automobile and agreed to pay him one hundred dollars a week in gold.

Conners found everybody in northern Mexico for Villa. Also he found that every one was a hero. By the time he arrived at Guaymas he had collected photographs and brief biographies of no less than 280 Mexican patriots who had risked their lives and fortunes that Villa might triumph and Mexico might become the greatest nation on the face of the earth.

Amid the Villa "vivas" of the populace Conners retired one night in a Guaymas hotel. He was awakened by a soldier who told him that the city was in the hands of the Carranza forces and that he was a prisoner. The 280 biographies and photographs, also four weeks' salary, were confiscated. Conners was placed in jail and his typewriter was thrown in after him, with a scornful suggestion that he get busy and write something more about "thees Meester Villa."

In a railroad accident several years ago Conners lost his left leg and part of his right foot. He had purchased the best wooden leg that money could buy and used a steel extension to fill out the right shoe. When the jailer entered his cell the next morning, Conners' artificial leg and foot were lying on the floor.

Now, this jailer had also lost his left leg, and wore a rude peg in its place. With a cry of delight he pounced upon Conners' expensive artificial limb. His delight became ecstasy when he tried it on and found that it was a perfect fit. Saying something about a trade, he departed. For some reasons he also took the steel extension. The peg, which was the limb of a mesquite tree, was left lying on the floor.

A few minutes later the jailer returned. "I give you what you Americanos call some boot," he remarked pleasantly. Whereupon he set before Mr. Conners a plate of luscious tomatoes.

That afternoon the American consul got Conners out of jail. Another jailer unlocked the door for him. Conners wanted to start out immediately in search of his wooden leg and steel foot, but the consul persuaded him that discretion was the better part of valor, and induced him to board a tramp steamer for San Francisco. After he reached San Francisco, Conners remembered that he also lost an automobile in Guaymas. That, however, troubles him little. The auto was Villa's, but the leg, the foot, and the $400 were Conners' very own, and he expects Uncle Sam to demand their return without any beating around the bush by Mexico's warring heroes.

Meteor Falls in Michigan.

A meteor which fell near Standish, Mich., narrowly missed the residence of Charles Selman. The visitor whizzed down in the midst of a brilliant meteoric display, and buried itself so deep in Mr. Selman's yard that it hasn't been found. The hole in the ground is four feet across.

"Slippery John" Again at Liberty.

If the police of Charlestown, W. Va., succeed in their efforts to locate John Truslow, known to them as "Slippery John" and many other things, including aliases, it is probable that they will suspend a large anvil from his neck and nail his clothing to a cell wall. He has escaped, drat him! for the eighth time in two months, and, with right hands raised, the police are remarking that, so help them, never again!

John Truslow, according to the police, has been tried and found guilty of every crime of which a mentality such as John Truslow's is capable. This has limited John's activities greatly, but recently, while awaiting trial on a charge of stealing a straw hat, he burst from the jail, nearly sweeping it away, and ran to the bird store of John Fisher in the dead of a Saturday night.

There the police, attracted by eight electric bulbs that John illuminated, found him whispering to a gold fish and acting in a frightfully suspicious manner. They crept upon him stealthily, as the department requires them to do. Just as they reached him, a parrot, awakened from its sleep, said: "Officer, there's your man!" There could be no mistake, they had corroboration.

When the reserves, with Slippery John sliding along among them, reached the jail, they saw the warden come screaming from the building. They asked him wherefore the noise and whence his course, to which he replied that Slippery John, the demon skidder, had flown the jail. Then he saw the prisoner, and wept, kissed him on the forehead, and slammed him back in his cell.

All went well until the other night, at the well-known and justly revered witching hour of midnight. Peter Austin, member of a very aristocrooked family, rose up feebly from his part of John's cell and declared he was ill, requiring water. The warden, who sometimes drinks the stuff himself, was merciful, and let Peter patter out.

The cell door—gods, what an error!—was left open, and when Peter returned—tableaux! Slippery John gone again!

The warden is inconsolable. He has issued an order that hereafter all prisoners that gasp for water must remain in their cells and drink from the nozzle of the hose.

Vaudeville Stunts in Mountain Settlements.

Little mountain settlements in the region of Julian, Cal., have their vaudeville circuits, and they are as important to the people and afford them as much pleasure as Keith's or the Orpheum afford pleasure seekers of the large cities.

The players are generally Mexicans. They travel by wagon or burro, coming up from lower California, swinging across the mining region, and turning south again into the peninsula.

A handbill pinned to the door of the post office or store is the only program. It announces, in Spanish, that a company of artists, unsurpassed for excellence, will be honored to entertain the people at greatly reduced prices—fifteen cents for children and twenty-five cents for adults, whereas in large cities, like Ensenada, the company wouldn't attempt to do the same thing for less than a dollar admission.

Sometimes the performance is acrobatic; sometimes it is a concert, with accordion and guitar, to be followed with a dance; again it may be an old-fashioned Punch and Judy show, or a roaring comedy, the actors speaking their lines in Spanish, which, by the way, makes no difference to the border folks, all of whom understand that tongue.

In addition to the handbill, a crier goes through the vicinity, announcing from house to house the merits of the performers, and urging everybody not to miss this last and only chance to see and hear so rare a collection of stars, who, meanwhile, are preparing their evening meal beside the road and making their beds under a tree.

The play is staged wherever shelter can be found—in schoolhouse or some large barn, or, more likely, in the dance hall, for nearly every settlement has such a place. The settings are easily procured. A plank across the tops of two barrels may serve either as a terrible abyss or a shaded silvan walk.

The following morning the all-star troupe rolls out of its separate and individual blankets, cooks breakfast in the open, jumps astride burros, or tumbles into a wagon and makes for the next-night stand.

Roughrider's Story of German "Wild West."

Herman Kepple, a circus rider, whose home was formerly in Afton, Okla., at one time with Buffalo Bill's Wild West circus, and for several years a member of a German "Wild West" aggregation, has just returned on account of the circus having been broken up by the war in Europe. Kepple says that he was more than sorry that he had to return, for his monthly salary with the German show was equal to a small fortune. The big circus was composed of close to 2,000 persons, and rifle shooting, riding, and other "dare-devil" stunts, such as made the stolid Germans gasp, was Kepple's specialty.

As soon as war was declared, the Cossacks with the show were placed in prison, the English and Japanese actors were taken into custody, and most of the German members had to join the colors.

Still the management tried to keep the show going, using neutral actors and Germans who did not have to join the army, but the attendance grew less and less. Then, as a last resort, they began the production of a spectacular scene known as "Europe in Flames." This showed—with the crash of big guns and the clash of steel—the progress of the war, and the supposed ending, all leaning in favor of the Germans.

Kepple was supposed to be a royal hussar for a while, then an English soldier and prisoner of war; at times he played dead, and was carried off the field. The beginning of the spectacle pictured the cause of the war, and ended with a general drawing of swords and presenting of arms, with the kaiser, of course, being the last one to draw his weapon. This last was always received with many cheers.

Another Oklahoma cowboy, A. W. Beasley, and Arma Reuter, from Texas, were with the same outfit. Kepple says that Reuter returned to Texas, but does not know what became of Beasley.

Always the Germans won in this mimic war. Even so, the populace soon tired of it, for the real war was carrying off thousands of the nation's sons. The owners decided to disband. Kepple and Reuter concluded to join the German army, but when they found that they would have to renounce their own country, they backed out.

Negro Finds Rope with Cow Attached.

A negro, Arthur Chairs—his name was part of the set—brought into the Memphis city court on a charge of larceny, carried with him a minstrel joke that Dan Rice used to knock 'em off the seats with years ago. It was so old that it became new when viewed in the serious light in which the negro placed it.

Nobody ever thought that there was any foundation for the old, exculpatory joke that a thief picked up a rope that had a horse at the other end of it, until Arthur Chairs demonstrated beyond doubt that the joke had a foundation in serious fact.

The negro was charged with the larceny of a cow from the rural districts around Oakville. Henry Grant, a negro, appeared as prosecutor. Henry lost the cow.

"Your honor," said the detective who apprehended the prisoner and his bovine charge, "Henry Grant, here, the prosecutor, lost a cow, and we found Arthur Chairs trying to sell it."

"What was the cow worth?" asked Justice Biggs, who was wielding the gavel at the session.

"About fifty dollars," said Grant.

"Must have been a Jersey," said the judge.

"It was, judge," said the detective, "and a young heifer, at that."

"Arthur."

"Yessah, jedge."

"Ever been up here before on a charge of this kind?" asked the judge.

"Nossah, jedge, I sho nevah wah heah befo' in mah life."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I wucks, jedge, wucks all de time."

"What sort of work do you engage in?" asked the judge.

"I does mos' any kinds of wuck I kin find ter do dese days."

"Now, then, Arthur, the preliminaries are settled. Tell us about this cow."

"I don't know much 'bout dat cow, jedge, I sho don't."

"Your associations with this bovine were of a pleasant nature, if not of much duration, were they not?" smiled the judge.

"Yassah, jedge, yassah."

"Just to come right down to plain words, you stole that cow, did you not?" asked the judge sharply.

"Nossah, jedge, I can't say dat I done stole dat cow at all."

"Does your high regard for the truth prevent you making a statement to that effect?"

"Yassah, jedge, yassah. I sho gwine ter tell yo' de trufe 'bout it."

"I feel justified in expecting that," laughed the judge.

"Yassah, jedge, yassah."

"If you did not steal the cow, tell us how you became the possessor of it."

"Tells yo', jedge. I's passin' 'long de road, an' dis cow standin' dah, seemin' lak she lost. I stops and 'gins ter see if I kin identify huh. Den she 'pears ter know me, an' I rubs her about de neck, an' she lay huh haid ovah on me jes' lak she wants me ter take care oh huh. Den I drap de rope 'aroun' huh horns an' walked away."

"She followed you?"

"Yassah, jedge, yassah; she sho did."

"Didn't have to pull on the rope?"

"Nossah, jedge, not er bit."

"Hold him for the State," ordered the judge, and the cow's guardian *pro tem.* was escorted below.

Disabled Coal Miner Dies.

After five years' struggle against great physical and financial odds, Fred Ellwanger, sole survivor of the Marianna mine disaster in 1908, died at his home in Charleroi, Pa.

Ellwanger came to this country from Germany in 1908, and secured work in the Marianna mine just the day before the explosion that cost about two hundred lives. On that day Ellwanger was at work at the bottom of the shaft. He told friends afterward that he was afraid to work in the mine on account of the large amount of gas he noticed in the reaches.

When the explosion came, he was knocked senseless, but fell with his head near a pool of water; this kept his head moist and saved him from death.

He was the only man saved from the explosion. He was rushed to a hospital, where the physicians said he could not live. Forty-two pieces of coal and stone were taken from his body.

For weeks he lingered between life and death, and finally was pronounced on the road to recovery. He never fully recovered.

Unable to work, he published a book telling his story of the disaster. The coal company promptly attempted to suppress the book, and it is still under the company's ban.

The Nick Carter Stories

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY — BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS

When it comes to detective stories worth while, the **Nick Carter Stories** contain the only ones that should be considered. They are not overdrawn tales of bloodshed. They rather show the working of one of the finest minds ever conceived by a writer. The name of Nick Carter is familiar all over the world, for the stories of his adventures may be read in twenty languages. No other stories have withstood the severe test of time so well as those contained in the **Nick Carter Stories.** It proves conclusively that they are the best. We give herewith a list of some of the back numbers in print. You can have your news dealer order them, or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage stamps.

704—Written in Red.
707—Rogues of the Air
709—The Bolt from the Blue.
710—The Stockbridge Affair.
711—A Secret from the Past.
712—Flaying the Last Hand.
713—A Slick Article.
714—The Taxicab Middle
717—The Master Rogue's Alibi.
719—The Dead Letter.
720—The Allerton Millions.
728—The Mummy's Head.
729—The Statue Clue.
730—The Torn Card.
731—Under Desperation's Spur.
732—The Connecting Link.
733—The Abduction Syndicate.
736—The Toils of a Siren.
738—A Plot Within a Plot.
739—The Dead Accomplice.
741—The Green Scarab.
746—The Secret Entrance.
747—The Cavern Mystery.
748—The Disappearing Fortune.
749—A Voice From the Past.
752—The Spider's Web.
753—The Man With a Crutch.
754—The Rajah's Regalia.
755—Saved from Death.
756—The Man Inside.
757—Out for Vengeance.
758—The Poisons of Exili.
759—The Antique Vial.
760—The House of Slumber.
761—A Double Identity.
762—"The Mockers" of Strattgem.
765—The Man that Came Back.
764—The Tracks in the Snow.
765—The Babbington Case.
766—The Masters of Millions.
767—The Blue Stone.
768—The Lost Clew.
770—The Turn of a Card.
771—A Message in the Dust.
772—A Royal Flush.
774—The Great Buddha Beryl.
775—The Vanishing Heiress.
776—The Unfinished Letter.
777—A Difficult Trail.
782—A Woman's Stratagem.
783—The Cliff Castle Affair.
784—A Prisoner of the Tomb.
785—A Resourceful Foe.
789—The Great Hotel Tragedies.
795—Zanoni, the Transfigured.
796—The Lure of Gold.
797—The Man with a Chest.
798—A Shadowed Life.
799—The Secret Agent.
800—A Plot for a Crown.
801—The Red Button.
802—Up Against It.
803—The Gold Certificate.
804—Jack Wise's Hurry Call.
805—Nick Carter's Ocean Chase.
807—Nick Carter's Advertisement.
808—The Kregoff Necklace.
811—Nick Carter and the Nihilists.
812—Nick Carter and the Convict Gang.
813—Nick Carter and the Guilty Governor.
814—The Triangled Coin.
815—Ninety-nine—and One.
816—Coin Number 77.

NEW SERIES

NICK CARTER STORIES

1—The Man from Nowhere.
2—The Face at the Window.
3—A Fight for a Million.
4—Nick Carter's Land Office.
5—Nick Carter and the Professor.
6—Nick Carter's Mill Hand.
7—A Single Clew.
8—The Emerald Snake.
9—The Currie Outfit.
10—Nick Carter and the Kidnaped Heiress.
11—Nick Carter Strikes Oil.
12—Nick Carter's Hunt for a Treasure.
13—A Mystery of the Highway.
14—The Silent Passenger.
15—Jared Green's Secret.
16—Nick Carter's Pipe Line Case.
17—Nick Carter and the Gold Thieves.
18—Nick Carter's Auto Chase.
19—The Corrigan Inheritance.
20—The Green Eye of Dentona.
21—The Spider's Parlor.
22—Nick Carter's Quick Guess.
23—Nick Carter and the Murderess.
24—Carter and the Pay Car.
25—The Stolen Antique.
26—The Crook League.
27—An English Crackman.
28—Nick Carter's Still Hunt.
29—Nick Carter's Electric Shock.
30—Nick Carter and the Stolen Duchess.
31—The Purple Spot.
32—The Stolen Groom.
33—The Inverted Cross.
34—Nick Carter and the Reno McCall.
35—Nick Carter's Death Trap.
36—Nick Carter's Chinese Puzzle.
37—The Man Outside.
38—The Death Chamber.
39—The Wind and the Wire.
40—Nick Carter's Three Cornered Chase.
41—Duane, the Arch-Fiend.
42—The Queen of the Seven.
43—Crossed Wires.
44—A Crimson Clew.
45—The Third Man.
46—The Slave of the Dagger.
47—The Devil Worshipers.
48—The Cross of Daggers.
49—At Risk of Life.
50—The Deeper Game.
51—The Code Message.
52—The Last of the Seven.
53—Ten-ichi, the Wonderful.
54—The Secret Order of Associated Crooks.
55—The Golden Hair Clew.
56—Back From the Dead.
57—Through Dark Ways.
58—When Aces Were Trumps.
59—The Gardener's Last Hand.
60—The Murder at Linden Fells.
61—A Game for Millions.
62—Under Cover.
63—The Last Call.
64—Mercedes Danton's Double.
65—The Millionaire's Nemesis.
66—A Princess of the Underworld.
67—The Crook's Blind.
68—The Fifth Man.
69—Blood Money.
70—A Queer of Her Kind.
71—Isabel Benton's Trump Card.
72—A Princess of Hades.
73—A Prince of Plotters.
74—The Crook's Double.
75—For Life and Honor.
76—A Compact With Duzaar.
77—In the Shadow of Duzaar.
78—The Crime of a Money King.
79—Birds of Prey.
80—The Unknown Dead.
81—The Severed Hand.
82—The Terrible Game of Millions.
83—A Dead Man's Power.
84—The Secrets of an Old House.
85—The Wolf Within.
86—The Yellow Coupon.
87—In the Toils.
88—The Stolen Radium.
89—A Crime in Paradise
90—Behind Prison Bars.
91—The Blind Man's Daughter.
92—On the Brink of Ruin.
93—Letter of Fire.
94—The $100,000 Kiss.
95—Outlaws of the Militia.
96—The Opium-Runners.
97—In Record Time.
98—The Wanted Clew.
99—The Middle Link.
100—The Crystal Maze.
101—A New Serpent in Eden.
102—The Auburn Sensation.
103—A Dying Chance.
104—The Gargoni Girdle.
105—Trade in Jeopardy.
106—The Ghost Launch.
107—Up in the Air.
108—The Girl Prisoner.
109—The Red Plague.
110—The Arson Trust.
111—The King of the Firebugs.
112—Off for the Lotos.
113—French Jimmie and His Forty Thieves.
114—The Death Plot.
115—The Evil Formula.
116—The Burton.
117—The Deadly Parallel.
118—The Vile Confession.
119—The Stolen Brain.
120—An Uncanny Revenge.
121—The Call of Death.
122—The Suicide.
123—The Million Ransom.
124—The Girl Kidnaper.
125—The Pirate Yacht.
126—The Crime of the White Hand.
127—Found in the Jungle.
128—Six Men In a Coop.
129—The Jewels of Wat Chang.
130—The Crime in the Tower.
131—The Fatal Message.
132—Broken Bars.
133—Won by Magic.
134—The Secret of Shangore.
135—Straight to the Goal.
136—The Man They Held Back.
137—The Seal of Gijon.
138—The Traitors of the Tropics.
139—The Pressing Peril.
140—The Mottled Pot.
Dated May 22d, 1915.
141—The Duplicate Night.
Dated May 29th, 1915.
142—The Edge of a Crime.
Dated June 5th, 1915.
143—The Sultan's Pearls.
Dated June 12th, 1915.
144—The Clew of the White Collar.

PRICE, FIVE CENTS PER COPY. If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your news dealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage stamps taken the same as money

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK CITY